

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A SONGWRITER:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELF-PERCEPTIONS AND
EARLY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERIENCES

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Music was an integral part of my teenage years. It provided me with a sense of self that had been suppressed in almost every other aspect of my life. At times family life for me was difficult and confusing, and music provided an avenue through which my emotions could be voiced; more important, music provided a way for my pain to be heard. In the final analysis, music gave me identity. When most teenagers begin to mature and blossom, I, on the other hand, had only “the music” to show me the way. I remember a song from an album we had at my house as a child. It was written by a man named Walter Brennan. He spoke of family, community, and a simplicity that implanted many of the ideals that had evaded me throughout my years at home. The song constructed images of wholesomeness, kindness, and love. Everything I had wished for as a child was present in these words by a man I had never met, yet I felt I knew him as personally as I knew my own family. I yearned to live the words he spoke, and even to this day the words of those special songs touch a place in my heart that no other person or object has. Thank you, Mr. Brennan.

In a way all of us have the capacity to convey messages through music because we all live in and experience our worlds in an emotional way. For me writing words on paper came easily and fluidly, but I never envisioned myself as a singer or a musician or even a writer of songs. I had never been exposed to any music other than the radio and my father’s music collection. No one ever sang around my house nor were there any instruments to play or practice on.

Yet, my admiration for those people who could convey such powerful messages in music was very deep-seated because in my own life it was “those songs” that gave me hope. It was “those songs” that allowed me to cry, to dream, and to assure myself that somewhere “out there” someone else was feeling the way I did.

It has been a long time since those tumultuous years of my adolescence, but if there has remained any constants in my life since then, it is that sense of loyalty to a distinct part of our culture that supplied the vision for my own American dream, the music. And it was “the music” that became my friend, my mentor, and my dream that someday I could attain some level of peacefulness in my life if I could just find that “place” that Walter Brennan sang about.

Today, I am a mother of two teenagers, a college instructor, a graduate student, and the wife of a songwriter. All of my roles have influenced the subject of my thesis, but the most important of these roles are the ones that touch the deepest emotion in me. They are the roles that create the greatest symphonies, the most moving lyrics, and the songs that you sing over and over. They are roles through which you experience the most pain and, at the same time, the most happiness. You can not find these anywhere else but in your own family.

My children and I have been through much in our years of growing together, and some of the most memorable days are those of riding along to and from school singing along to the “Oldies.” Even now, as teenagers, they may catch a day when I’m blaring some of “those songs” that I have played over the years. It still surprises me to hear them sing along just as if they had been teenagers when “those songs” were popular. I guess, in a way, they were, through me.

Two years before I finished my bachelor’s degree I met a man in a bar,

sitting on a stage, strumming a guitar. He struck me as odd because it seemed as if he had no cognizance of the chaos around him. He just sat there alone, playing a song as if he were playing to entertain Mother Nature. He had a quiet emotion about his playing, and I remember thinking how peaceful his playing made me feel. Six years later I am married to that guitar player and throughout those six years I've come to know a side of the music world to which I had not previously been exposed. What I also learned was that there was a very personal part of this man that I felt I could never understand. As kind and gentle-spirited as he is, he is even more a person who prefers solitude to groups, quietness to talking, and strumming a guitar to holding hands. Love can be a very powerful motivator, and in my case it was. It was important for me not only to understand my husband's world but to understand what factors may have influenced him to speak for himself through music as opposed to letting someone else's music speak for him as I did. Was music as important to his socialization as it was to mine? Finally, I realized that this singer, this musician was supposed to be part of my life and my children's lives. He is a good man. He fits like the piece of puzzle that was lost or misplaced, and finally, finally, there evolved a sense of peacefulness that had evaded me for so many years.

The only other peacefulness I found was in my educational endeavors. It has taken me several years to find my own niche in society but low and behold an Introductory Sociology class changed all that. I learned a great deal about myself in those sociology classes. More importantly, I learned that success was not about diplomas but about knowledge, and so my path began towards the study of human behavior. I was utterly captivated by the theories of sociological thought and by the "rock and roll" professor who dared to ask me "so what?" Dr. Groce is

one of those professors whom you come across once in an education that touches a part of your mind that you never knew existed. I remember thinking in class, as I watched him explain some of the most difficult of sociological concepts, that no human being could know that much. I was impressed by his knowledge. I was even more impressed by his ability to share that knowledge in a way that I could understand. Dr. Groce, you are the most intelligent person I have ever encountered, academically or otherwise, and I am profoundly affected by what I have learned from you. I thank you for your interest in my education and for all the support you have given me on my thesis not to mention that you are just plain "cool." I must also thank Dr. Krenzin who provided me a sense of confidence in knowing that her expertise would help me accomplish that "perfect" thesis. The third member of my committee, Dr. Onyekwuluje, provided that final voice that gave my thesis a broader range of ideas. Thank you, Dr. Groce, Dr. Krenzin and Dr. Onyekwuluje for all of your support.

For me music has not only been an integral part of my life but it has also altered, influenced, and directed my path. Because I am a person who treasures every single moment I have with my children and husband, I tend to go to great lengths to learn how to be a better influence in their lives. The result is a thesis engulfed in the emotion of a little girl following the musical notes of life who matured into a woman searching for a better understanding of love and family. The search ended when I found the very "heart" of every song. "I write the songs...", (Manilow, 1975).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ix
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	8
CHAPTER III. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
CHAPTER IV. METHODOLOGY.....	28
CHAPTER V. ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES.....	37
The Family Members.....	38
The Individual.....	45
CHAPTER VI. SELF-PERCEPTIONS.....	53
The Personality.....	53
The Songs and Venues.....	56
The Significant Other.....	61
The Statements.....	63
The Success.....	65
The Identity.....	68
CHAPTER VII. TYPES OF SONGWRITERS.....	74
The Characteristics.....	78
CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSIONS.....	89
Limitations.....	93
Future Research.....	94
APPENDIX A INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	96

APPENDIX	B	RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM.....	100
APPENDIX	C	PROFILE.....	101
REFERENCES.....			103

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE 1 TYPES OF SONGWRITERS.....	88

The Process of Becoming A Songwriter: A Qualitative Analysis
of Self-Perceptions and Early Environmental Influences

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Becoming a songwriter implies a process through which someone must experience specific things indigenous to the social world of songwriters. This research focused on the process someone goes through to become a songwriter. The process as described by the actor is influenced by both the actor and society.

Previous research is limited to structural factors while this study allows the social actor to describe, in his or her own words, how his or her self-perceptions and early environmental influences have altered, influenced, and directed the process the songwriter experiences to become a member of the social world of songwriters. All fifteen songwriters that were interviewed for this thesis described similar environmental influences. All grew up in family environments that provided some type of musical influence. They remember watching their grandparents sing or play an instrument, or they have grown up in an environment in which one or both of their parents were in some way involved in music. Eleven of the songwriters had a parent who played an instrument around the house, four of the parents were members of bands, six of the parents had

written songs or poems, and every single songwriter had at least one parent who played music around the house in the form of record collections or watched favorite television programs that were musical in format.

The environmental influences were extremely important in that they provided a beginning, a first step towards an understanding of the process that someone experiences to become a songwriter. Second, it becomes even more important to that understanding of the process to view the social world of songwriters through the eyes of the songwriter, and the best way to do that is to ask them to describe “how” they perceive themselves in relation to that process. Many of the songwriters described themselves as being songwriters at an early age, usually during their teenage years. At that time they perceived songwriting as a way to express themselves. Songwriting became their “avenue” not only to deal with life but also to make sense of what was going on around them. Many of the songwriters described themselves as successful not because they had sold songs but because they have grown and matured as individuals writing songs. They recognize that structural success in songwriting has to do with talent but also being in the right place, and the “right places” are part of the process that society controls. When asked if they would always envision themselves as songwriters, all of the songwriters said yes. Their self-perceptions are very clear when it comes to their role as songwriters. It is something they grew up identifying with their selves, and in every sense of their being, music is at the very heart of who they perceive themselves to be.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Stairway to Heaven” (Page 1971) talks about two paths. One path will lead you to heaven; the other will lead to self-destruction. How do I know? I know, because when I was in junior high school my friends and I listened to “Stairway to Heaven” over and over. Why? Somewhere in this song I identified with some word or verse. Popular music supplies feelings, thoughts, and situations with which people identify. That is what music is supposed to do, to reach people who will buy it because it makes them feel “something.” But, why does it make them feel “something?” Popular music makes people feel something because it is a symbol that people use to interpret their own social worlds and because behind every song there is a songwriter--the first person to feel that “something.”

Previous research has focused on the role of the songwriter and the stages through which songwriters go. We know, as Groce (1991) points out how important the songwriter's role is to the music industry. An article by Richard Peterson and Richard Ryan (1983), “Success, Failure, and Anomie in Arts and Crafts Work: Breaking into Commercial Country Music Songwriting,” describes how country songwriters go through a series of “barriers” before reaching success. We know very little about the process in terms of how the songwriters may have been influenced to begin the process of becoming songwriters. We also know very little about how they perceive themselves as they progress

through the process and how those self-perceptions relate to the process of becoming songwriters. Two things we do not know are how songwriters internalize influences and self-perceptions during the process of becoming songwriters and how those influences and self-perceptions direct the process.

This study is focused on the internal and external stimuli that influence people to become songwriters. It also examined the extent to which early environmental experiences may have influenced someone to pursue a career in songwriting. Understanding how various factors influence the process of becoming a songwriter will help in understanding many social worlds. If we want to become dancers or firemen, then it becomes important to know how dancers or firemen perceive themselves as they become firemen or dancers. It helps to explain why people continue to become songwriters or why a dancer would quit being a dancer. How we perceive ourselves influences whether or not we will attain certain levels of accomplishment in our lives, and it is fundamental to making sense of the social world of which we are trying to become a part (Mead [1931] 1993).

In this study the process of becoming a songwriter is examined through the lens of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism explains how social actors use symbols to act and interact in society and how we define and attach meanings to our behaviors as we act within society. The social world of songwriters requires interaction, interpretation, and a process through which songwriters come to identify themselves as members of the social world of songwriters. Hewitt (1976) explains three propositions.

Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. The meanings of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's

fellows. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 42)

Lastly, I examined how songwriters perceive themselves and how self-perception may or may not direct the path of becoming a songwriter. Mead, Blumer, Thomas, and Becker are the theorists I used for examining the internal and external stimuli. Mead's explanations of the development of the self will allow some insight into the emergence of the self of a songwriter. Herbert Blumer will help in identifying some of the ways that social actors interpret their social worlds as they experience the process of becoming songwriters, while W.I. Thomas provides some understanding of the ways social actors define their situations. Howard Becker contributes to the understanding of the process by which social actors attach meaning to their social worlds. Mead, Blumer, Thomas, and Becker, then, are the equipage I will use to examine the process someone experiences when he or she becomes a songwriter.

When becoming "something" we have made a decision to give a certain amount of importance or meaning to specific acts that are characteristic of becoming that "something." If we choose to become a songwriter or a heroin addict, we initiate the process by which we attach meaning to the acts and objects we associate with becoming a songwriter or heroin addict. The question then becomes whether the songwriter or heroin addict is more in control of the process of becoming or if the actor becomes "a recipient of the self-definition attached to him [sic] by society" (Stephens 1991, p. 19). How, then, do we come to realize we are becoming "something" without first knowing whether we will bring with us our own experiences, values, interpretations, and meanings to the

social world of which we wish to be a member? Herbert Blumer (1969) answers that question.

From the standpoint of symbolic interaction the organization of a human society is the framework inside of which social action takes place and is not the determinant of that action. Second, such organization and changes in it are the product of the activity of acting units and not of "forces" which leave such acting units out of account. Structural features, such as "culture," "social systems," "social stratification," or "social roles," set conditions for their action but do not determine the action. (p. 87)

In other words, the social world of songwriters is the framework. It provides parameters within which songwriters conduct the business of songwriting. Songwriters within the framework are provided pre-existing conditions for behavioral expectations but are not stripped of uniqueness. Becoming a songwriter, in part, is understanding how the social world is organized, how it is structured to socialize someone who wishes to become a songwriter. The process of symbolic interaction is the basis for that understanding.

To become "something" we would need to have some knowledge of that "something." Having knowledge about something implies we have had some exposure or experience with it. If I was exposed to something, I would have given it meaning; I would have interpreted it in some way. The "something" that I have been exposed to left me feeling good, good enough to want to pursue that feeling again so I decide to become "something" having to do with that pleasurable "something" I experienced. Chances are that an early environmental experience has exposed me to songwriting, and through the interaction of that experience I grew up wanting to become a songwriter. In Mead's ([1931] 1993) "The Emergent Self," it is suggested that human identities and actions arise as a result of interactions with other human beings. In other words, human beings "become" or emerge as a result of the influences of our interactions with others.

Becoming a songwriter, then, could very well be influenced by interactions in early environmental experiences and interactions that influence how we perceive ourselves.

Understanding interaction between human beings involves a qualitative analysis. Values, experiences, and self-perceptions must be defined from the actor's viewpoint, and the method employed for this study was in-depth interviews. I conducted interviews with fifteen songwriters connected to the songwriting and publishing industry in Musicville. Musicville is a city of approximately one million people located in the south central region of the United States. Interviewing songwriters is not a difficult process; there are so many to go around. Musicville is a mecca for aspiring songwriters, but Musicville songwriters do not necessarily experience the exact same process as songwriters in Texas or California. I am not as much concerned with the similarities in the framework of the social community of songwriters as in early environmental influences and self-perceptions. Interviewing songwriters with different demographic characteristics would increase the generalizability of our understanding of the process of becoming a songwriter.

The importance of this study is in understanding the importance of early environmental experiences and self-perceptions in determining the nature of the process one will experience when becoming a songwriter. Equally important is how much these two factors influence the amount of control the actor has in becoming a member of the social world of songwriters. And last, this study provides a time line from which a comparison can be made of self-perceptions prior to initiating the process, during initiation, and in the midst of the never ending process of becoming (Groce 1991).

Do certain factors allow more control for the “becomees” whereas other factors may increase control for society, e.g., financial success as a songwriter?

Mead ([1931] 1993) explained the nature of this control.

We are continually following up our own address to other persons by an understanding of what we are saying, and using that understanding in the direction of our continued speech. We are finding out what we are going to say, what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process we are continually controlling the process itself. (p.147)

In other words, as we talk to others we are also talking to ourselves, which allows us to be aware of what we say or do, and that will determine what we will say or do next (Mead [1931] 1993). Does this awareness necessarily denote control?

While we are engaged in conversations, I do not believe we are always aware of each word or sentence we speak, but I do believe we are very much in control of our ideas. If the ideas somehow get lost, we more often than not extinguish the conversation. When we choose to become a member of a social world, be it songwriters or billfishermen, we are to some extent controlling the nature of that process--the process of becoming “something.”

By exploring the influences of early environmental experiences and self-perceptions on becoming a songwriter, we can determine which part of the process of becoming “something” is controlled by society and which part by the actor. Symbolic interactionism explains both. The focus of this study, however, is how symbolic interactionism explains the control of the actor in determining the direction of the process of becoming something, in this case a songwriter.

Heroin addicts, as suggested by Stephens (1991, p. xii), become socialized into the social world of street addicts as their

social behavior develops not only as they respond to the expectations of others and experience their norms, but also through processes of social interaction as they anticipate the responses of other people to them and then incorporate them into their conduct patterns.

In other words, they are perceived by others as street addicts so they come to see themselves as street addicts. This perspective explains symbolic interaction as controlled by society. On the other hand, Blau (1955, p. 102) suggests the actor has more control than society, "if an individual with advancing years starts to conceive of himself as old and to act as an old person, others will treat him as such." The interesting question from this explanation is how can actors on one level be in control of their process and on another level have less control than society? Could this question be answered by whether or not the role is a deviant one? I believe the answer resides in the two factors I have chosen to examine.

Becoming a songwriter implies a process in which symbols are interpreted and given specific meanings. We attach those meanings to behaviors that we internalize as behaviors indigenous to a social world. Specifically, it is the social world of songwriters. I believe this process of interpretation, definition, and attachment is symbolic in and of itself. Therefore, in the following Chapter, I will delve into the theory of symbolic interactionism and how the principles and concepts of symbolic interactionism apply to the process of becoming a songwriter.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

“In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” (Ingle 1968), an acid rock song, hit the charts in the late sixties. What did it mean? What was happening culturally during that time period when millions of teenagers would have interpreted its message to symbolize something in their lives? Mead ([1931] 1993) described it in this way:

What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one's self what it arouses in the other individual. It must have that sort of universality to any person who finds himself in the same situation (p. 151).

“In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” in the literal sense means “in the Garden of Eden,” but it came to symbolize a generation of youth that dared to be closer to the evils of ecstasy than the Garden of Eden. The song was considered heavy metal for its time; and, as it climbed the charts, it took with it the voice of American youth. A new generation was emerging, one that was fed up with war, politics, conformity, and conservatism. “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” was written by the lead vocalist of the group Iron Butterfly. Did this person become a songwriter to send messages that had already been heard or that had already been written? What was his or her childhood like? Was he an introvert or an extrovert and how might that explain the symbol that “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” was meant to represent?

To become “something” means to bring forth a new self, one that never begins from scratch, yet requires new interactions and interpretations. Mead ([1931] 1993) describes the process.

...it is not sufficient for him merely to take the attitudes of other

human individuals toward himself and toward one another within the human social process, and to bring that social process as a whole into his individual experience merely in these terms: he must also, in the same way that he takes the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another, take their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged. (p. 154)

Doug Ingle, the person who wrote "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida," probably was not consciously aware that, as he became a songwriter, he was assuming the attitudes of all those members who make up the social world of songwriters. Mead labels this part of the self the "generalized other." This form of the "generalized other" is the form that influences the behavior of the actor who is becoming "something." To become a songwriter one must become aware of the organization or framework within which a song becomes a song. On the other hand, the social world of songwriters was not organized around the initial influences or interactions of people who wanted to shoot drugs into their veins. As Mead ([1931] 1993) states, the self is shaped by the "generalized other" and the "generalized other" is shaped by the self.

To understand the "generalized other" we need to understand how the self arises. Besides language, as Mead explains, there are two other social conditions in which the self emerges, the play and game stages. During the play stage the self is established by the organization of certain attitudes of others toward himself or herself and toward one another in specific social acts in which he or she participates with other members. The play stage is a "simple succession" of roles, one right after the other. The situations are characteristic of one's personality. What role a person or child is at one moment does not determine what he or she will be at another time. He or she is not yet organized

into a whole. At this stage there is no definite personality. During the game stage one internalizes an organization of specific individual attitudes, and an organization of the social attitudes of the group of which he or she is a member. The individual further organizes as he or she experiences the group attitudes and becomes a “reflection of the general systematic pattern” Mead([1931] 1993) of the group behavior. Within the group, actions are interrelated and provide unity. There is a definite end or limit to actions within a group so that no one’s actions conflict within the organization of attitudes. From the unity arises an organized personality.

As one takes on the attitude of others and allows other attitudes to determine future behavior with reference to a common end, he or she becomes a member of that society. Membership, then, becomes an organized process by which we allow the attitudes of the entire group to influence our behavior. The result becomes a distinctive personality that identifies us as a member of that social group.

Songwriters are not entirely manipulated by the role expectations provided within the social world of songwriters, but determine much of their own process as they engage in the activity of songwriting. Blumer (1969) offers this explanation:

His [sic] behavior, accordingly, is not a result of such things as environmental pressures, stimuli, motive, attitudes, and ideas but arises instead from how he interprets and handles these things in the action which he is constructing. (p. 82)

The songwriter, as explored in this thesis explored, does not entirely emerge without having been directed by factors unrelated to the social world of which he or she wishes to be a member. The interactions and interpretations that have led to the process of becoming “something” are still very much engrained in the self

that emerges once the process of “something” begins. Before someone aspires to be a member of the songwriting community and takes on the organized attitudes of that community, he or she had to be a member of other social groups--specifically the social group from which an interaction may have encouraged entry into the social group of songwriters. Here again Mead ([1931] 1993) addresses this development.

The process is one which develops, to be sure, into a more or less definite technique and is controlled; and yet we can say that it has arisen out of situations similar to which little children play at being a parent, at being a teacher--vague personalities that are about them and which affect them and on which they depend. These are personalities which they take, roles they play, and in so far control the development of their own personality. (p. 153)

In this respect our initial personalities have been determined in early childhood, and we are continually modifying and being modified by the social communities of which we become members. We learn through symbols how to interpret certain social worlds, and as we become members, we use previous interpretations and interactions to help in understanding new interpretations and interactions.

Symbolic interaction refers to the “distinctive and peculiar character” of human beings engaged in interaction. Herbert Blumer (1969) suggests that actors are not reacting to one another’s actions but are defining them.

The term “symbolic interaction” refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. (pp. 78-79)

How can interaction, then, not be controlled by the actor? In a sense we are in control of our actions, but only inasmuch as our definitions represent symbols that other social worlds have previously defined for us. The point here is that, as we

become songwriters, we are already equipped with symbols, maybe unrelated to the social community of songwriters but nonetheless equipped with a certain amount of “framework” knowledge. We set forth to attain membership within specific social communities; and while we are excited about “being,” we must still experience the “process of becoming.” What is the process of becoming? Is it the same for all social worlds? What factors influence, direct, or alter the process? Do we become molded by the attitudes of the community, or do we determine our own process?

George Herbert Mead ([1931] 1993) provides the paradigm I used to examine the process of becoming a songwriter. When we think of symbolism, we think of things such as the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, or things that bring forth strong meanings when mentioned; but how do we use symbols to interact with one another? Mead says that through definition we find shared interpretations of our social worlds. Further examination of the process of becoming a songwriter will also provide an understanding of W. I. Thomas’ (1972) concept of the definition of the situation. As someone becomes a songwriter, he or she is continuously assessing the environment before an action is delivered. What we hope to explore is whether action is determined more by the definition made by the actor or the definition already provided by society. Who has more control over interpretation, actor or society?

W. I. Thomas ([1931] 1972, p. 332) reminds us that “the family is the smallest social unit and the primary defining agency.” Mead suggests that the self is comprised of the “me,” the part of the self that is shaped by one’s environment, and the “I,” the part of the self that acts toward the environment. This combination explains an equal amount of control by both actor and society. When an actor chooses to enter into specific social communities, the process of

becoming provides the self with new objects, meanings, and actions. As the self emerges, the actor begins to interpret his or her own meaning and acts accordingly. Before someone initiated the process of becoming a songwriter, he or she probably had a different meaning for performing in front of family. What once someone received in the form of praise and encouragement from family now becomes less influential in determining self-definition as a songwriter.

Self-perceptions are important influences in the process of becoming. Actors perceive themselves as objects, and as they act towards themselves as objects, they also become the goal of those objects. As they act, their self-perception changes. Blumer (1969, p. 11) says, "the environment consists only of the objects that the given human beings recognize and know." Social worlds consist of objects not things, and because human beings use symbols and language, actors respond to objects they specify (Hewitt 1976). In other words, songwriters act toward themselves as they becomes songwriters; and as they become songwriters, they also become the goal as well as the object of that goal. Songwriters recognize that certain decibel levels of applause after a performance denote a certain amount of favorable or unfavorable response for that song. Knowing that applause is a way to measure response to a song, a songwriter will write or compose incorporating the attitudes of applauders toward himself or herself. The internalization of attitudes of applauders is an example of a songwriter becoming the object and the goal; he or she acts toward himself or herself using the example of the symbol of applauding and also become the goal of becoming a songwriter by writing or composing a song that will receive a favorable amount of applauding. Becker (1970) explains in the following passage:

The actor, in short, inspects the meanings his action will have for others,

assesses its utility in light of the actions that meaning will provoke in others, and may change the direction of his activity in such a way as to make the anticipated response more nearly what he would like. (p. 292)

Songwriters, as examined in this study, will alter their self-perceptions as they believe they are fulfilling the role of songwriter. Will their self-perceptions differ from one time period to another? Do their self-perceptions inhibit the process of becoming? Are their self-perceptions influenced more by definitions already provided within the social framework of songwriters, or are their self-perceptions influenced more by their own definitions of the situation?

Symbolic interactionism has also provided another avenue to pursue in terms of its application to the process of becoming a songwriter. The question, as symbolic interactionism is applied, can be asked of all social worlds. John Dewey (1972) provides the backdrop for another concern.

Few persons have either the energy or the wealth to build private roads to travel upon. They find it convenient, "natural," to use the roads that are already there. (p. 155)

Georg Simmel ([1908] 1971) states that no two people are the same, thus, providing the need for further inquiry.

It seems, however, that every individual has in himself a core of individuality which cannot be recreated by anybody else whose core differs qualitatively from his own. (p. 9)

Did Bob Dylan travel the same path as Mozart? If not, who provided the first "natural" road for songwriters to travel? Bob Dylan will go down in history as one of the greatest songwriters of the twentieth century, but why do we consider him so if he only followed behind Gershwin or Mancini? From a symbolic interactionist perspective Bob Dylan did travel a similar path as Gershwin and Mancini, but as Simmel ([1908] 1971) suggests in "How Is Society Possible?" Bob Dylan possessed a very unique form of individuality as did those before him.

It is because of those before him that Bob Dylan was free to create a new road, the “natural” road for Bob Dylan.

Its purely individual, real nature and its group nature fuse into a new, autonomous phenomenon. We see the other not simply as an individual but as a colleague or comrade or fellow party member--in short, as a cohabitant of the same specific world. (p. 11)

In other words, each path is different yet the same. It becomes a dichotomy that relies on both sides to explain one phenomenon, that of becoming a songwriter. Wealth is not needed, only a sense of one’s own “naturalness.” Bob Dylan, whether because of early childhood influences or his self-perceptions, carved out his own path that at some point either connected to or widened the path of the Gershwins before him. What leads us to believe that Bob Dylan connected to or widened the path of the Gershwins before him? We do not know, but we do know that there is only one Bob Dylan. We know there was only one Martin Luther King, Jr., one Irving Berlin, and still only one Billie Jean King.

Symbolic interaction provides us with forms of communication, forms of meanings and definable objects, and a form from which we can understand each other as we occupy the same life spaces and social worlds. Maintaining the ability to think enables us to control our own process of interaction. Mead ([1931] 1993) summarized it quite well.

His most significant insight was his view of human behavior as reflexive, by which he meant that you and I think before we act in many of our important activities. (p. 146)

The role of songwriter, like all social roles, is not entirely contingent on society’s definition of that role nor can we become “something” without someone else having given us some meaning by which we can perceive ourselves as similar to or different from that role. Environment provides a framework within which actors can construct their own meanings. Actors must also use in their definition

and construction of meaning a certain sense of their own uniqueness as they set forth to subscribe to specific social worlds, for without this uniqueness the “natural” path becomes narrow, and eventually we all begin to feel, think, and act alike. Mead ([1931] 1993, p. 165) says it so eloquently:

For instance, there is a group of individuals that have to work together. In a society there must be a set of common organized habits of response found in all, but the way in which individuals act under specific circumstances gives rise to all of the individual differences which characterize the different persons. The fact that they have to act in a certain common fashion does not deprive them of originality. The common language is there, but different use of it is made in every new contact between persons; the element of novelty in the reconstruction takes place through the reaction of the individuals to the group to which they belong.

All of the actors who participate in specific social communities bring with them their own meanings and symbols. Those meanings and symbols result from previous social worlds of which they are or are not current members. How do we know if the experiences change from the process of becoming a member in one social world to the process of becoming a member in another social world? How can each member of any social world experience the same process of becoming?

Mead's ([1931] 1993, p. 159) concepts of the “me” and the “I” provide the analytical tools with which we can try to understand how we experience the process of becoming “something.”

The simplest way of handling the problem would be in terms of memory. I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The “I” of this moment is present in the “me” of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick [sic] enough to catch myself. I become a “me” in so far as I remember what I said. The “I” can be given, however, this functional relationship. It is because of the “I” that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. It is in memory that the “I” is constantly present in experience, and then we are dependent upon memory images for the rest. So that the “I” in memory is there as the spokesman of the self of the second, or minute, or day ago.

Therefore, every single interaction experienced by the self through the spontaneous “I” becomes part of the memory that constitutes the “me.” Each “I” becomes a “me” the self changes. In this analysis of Mead’s “self” no two experiences will ever be the same. As human beings evolve from the parts of our “selves” that engage in situational activity, we emerge as someone different whether we become songwriters or nurses. And, as we experience the process by which we become those objects, we can never experience any part of a process as we might have the day or moment before because other parts of our “self” have emerged or changed since then. Blumer (1969) explains,

Instead of the individual being surrounded by an environment of pre-existing objects which play upon him and call forth his behavior, the proper picture is that he constructs his objects on the basis of his on-going activity. (p. 80)

The actor interprets those objects, including himself, from his own indexes, thus giving them meaning that he understands and from which he can act. As with the actor who is experiencing the process of becoming a songwriter, he or she will always be engaging in activity as someone different from the person who engaged in the previous activity.

Becoming a songwriter, then, becomes a unique endeavor. Is that to say, as Groce (1991) has suggested, that the process of becoming is never-ending? Mead might be inclined to agree inasmuch as an actor retains a certain level of commitment to the social community of songwriters. From a symbolic interactionist’s perspective then, the “never-ending process of becoming” would be hard to dispute.

The focus of this study was to examine two dimensions of the process of becoming a songwriter. Early environmental experiences and self-perceptions--as Mead ([1931] 1993) has referred to in “The Emergent

Self"--are important factors in understanding how the self emerges. The stages that Mead explains give a basis for further inquiry into whether a parallel exists between each self that arises when becoming members in different social worlds; yet, questions do remain unanswered. Is every process the same for every social world and for every individual, including the primary process that occurs in childhood? Do we start over each time in each new social world and, if not, how can we assume that every individual experiences the same process of becoming?

Through the works of Mead, Blumer, Becker, and Thomas this study has helped to explain the dichotomy of the self and society in influencing the process of becoming a songwriter. Mead's concept of the "generalized other" has also helped in explaining a degree of similarity that social worlds share and the influence the "generalized other" has in the process of becoming a songwriter. Every actor who enters into membership of a social world will undoubtedly alter the framework as did Bob Dylan; yet, even Bob Dylan experienced some of what Beethoven experienced in becoming a songwriter.

Focusing on environmental experiences and self-perception allowed me to get at the heart of the experiences that would certainly imply human difference. If, as sociologists, we agree that no two individuals could ever have the same environmental experiences or self-perceptions, then we have arrived at the first step in explaining the process of becoming. Without knowing the initial differences among songwriters in early environmental experiences and in self-perceptions we can never understand how persons as a social group come to make up that group. Identifying differences among members of the same social group suggests similarities in structure or framework that allow the freedom to choose to become a songwriter. Thus, a dichotomy exists. Must we be similar

to have different interests, wants, and goals? In other words, must there be a world that provides one set of frameworks for some persons to become songwriters while others, with different frameworks, prefer to become doctors?

Is the process of becoming a songwriter different from becoming a college professor or race-car driver? What are the experiences that influence us in becoming a songwriter, professor, or race-car driver? If our experiences are different in terms of environmental experiences and self-perception, how do we ever become members of the same social group if we do not go through the same process? Mead's explanation of "the emergent self" helps us see the similar symbols that make us different.

Before I begin the research process I must first look at what we already know about songwriters. Becoming something implies a process one will experience to become that something. Could becoming other social status' be similar to becoming a songwriter? If becoming a fireman or nurse is similar in process to becoming a songwriter, then, it becomes important to identify those similarities and differences in terms of their influence on the process. By reviewing the literature I will know of the research that has been done and become more aware of the additional research needed. The following chapter provides that review of the literature.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

I want to write songs. Other people's songs make me feel certain emotions that I would not otherwise feel. I want to be able to do that, to incite emotions in people. How do I become a songwriter? Maybe I want to become a ballerina. What is the process through which I will go to become a songwriter or a ballerina? How do I become "something"? Groce (1991, p. 40) examines the socialization process of songwriters, the "never ending process of becoming." As songwriters become familiar with the social world of songwriting, they will engage in identity construction work (Groce 1991). In other words, a process of adaptation occurs as one becomes identified as a songwriter. Also in the social context of songwriters, Groce (1991) has identified four stages to becoming a songwriter: the beginning stage, the intermediate stage, the mature stage, and the professional or advanced stage. These stages help to visualize the development of the songwriters as they become members of the social world of songwriters. Another study conducted by Groce (1989) explored the differing ideologies of musicians who performed copy material as opposed to musicians who did original material. The importance of Groce's study was the suggestion that a difference existed in how musicians internalized specific symbols common to the social world of musicians. The differences he found implies socialization or the process of becoming an original musician or songwriter could be different than for other musicians.

The study by Groce (1989) is similar to a study conducted by Finnegan

(1989). Finnegan comes from a little different perspective in that her focus is on the different music worlds and how musicians learn the music of those different music worlds. This study would also imply that a socialization process exists, yet no reference is made to any factors precipitating membership to different music worlds.

Within the category of songwriters there exist different types of songwriters. A discussion by Faulkner (1983) on Hollywood composers provides an in-depth look at some of the problems these composers encounter in the film industry. Problems by any songwriter would certainly affect his or her self-perception, and Faulkner does direct his interviews towards the experiences of composers within the industry but does not relate those experiences to socialization.

Etzkorn (1963) explored the socio-economic factors that influence songwriters, suggesting that higher-status homes produced more "serious composers." He also states that songwriters, as do other professionals, learn the expectations of the social role and conform to them. This vantage point relies more on the business of music and how that influences the process of songwriting, not necessarily on the self-perceptions of songwriters.

Social roles require a certain amount of learning the ropes, so to speak. In the music industry, in specific songwriting, people must "break in" (Peterson and Ryan 1983, p. 306). Peterson and Ryan discuss "barriers" that a songwriter must break through to become successful. They define a clear ending that is reliant on standards set by those in the music industry--those who own the means of production. "Even for the novice, then, it is important to have connections" (Peterson and Ryan 1983, p. 306). If I cannot even "break into" songwriting without connections, then why would I want to be a songwriter? Why would I subject myself to constant rejection? There must be a need, a motivator, that

becomes a constant companion of someone who goes through such rejection and/or hard, endless work to be recognized as being a songwriter. If so, how is the process perceived by the one who is becoming a songwriter? Is this aspect, the self-perception, not imperative to understanding how we become “something”? In an article by L. Thomas Winfree, Jr., Lawrence Kielich, and Robert E. Clark (1984) entitled “On Becoming a Prosecutor,” law students address their inadequacies at being good prosecutors due to lack of academic preparation and not by lack of experience in a prosecutor’s office. In other words, law students felt the internships were less helpful to becoming a prosecutor than were the years spent in an academic environment. In this respect the self-perception of the law students as academicians seems to be more influential to “becoming a prosecutor” than the socialization gained through an internship.

How important, then, is the process if defined by anyone other than the “becomee”? Simpson (1979) argues that the socialization process is less valuable as a learning process than as an “occupational recruitment.” Does Simpson suggest that the socialization process of becoming “something” is not really about learning anything but merely a predesigned system meant to recruit members? If Simpson is correct, then self-perceptions are not important at all. It becomes a case of survival of the fittest; you either have it, or you do not. Many would agree that becoming “something” is greatly influenced by those who own the means to make or break you; yet, I wonder if we give far too little credit to the “becomees.” Do we want so badly to become “something” that we allow ourselves to be molded into little “something” robots? I think the reason we believe we could so easily be molded is that we know so very little about those things unique to each person’s reasons for becoming something. There is an

enormous amount of literature defining the processes of becoming but only how it relates to the system as a whole.

For a songwriter who has aged quite gracefully in the songwriting business it could be of some relevance to understand the self-perception of someone that is a songwriter and considered elderly. Stanton (1988) conducted a study on jazz musicians who were over the age of fifty-five. Although Stanton's study is limited to jazz musicians it does suggest a strong relationship between the intrinsic value of being a musician and continuing to be a musician even when considered old for a career in music. Here again we have the implied message that something ingrained in the self influences future behavior.

Marcello Keller (1986, p. 168) in his discussion of music and ethnomusicology suggests the importance of "understanding the relationship between musical and social phenomena." His suggestion is that "musical sociology" should be approached in one of four different ways, one of which pertains to the direction of this study: the empirical approach. The empirical approach as Keller submits focuses on, among others, the "socialization of musicians." Although Keller does not elaborate in great detail on how to approach our understanding of that process, it is important to note that a process exists and to understand fully that process we must acknowledge that structure is not the only influence on the socialization process.

I have researched the importance of one aspect of becoming something; the aspect that deals with the uniqueness of someone who becomes a songwriter. It is important to understand the aspect of uniqueness from the viewpoint of the songwriter and how each songwriter's self-perception influences the process of becoming. Without the humanistic quality of becoming something, there would not be a Bob Dylan, a Beethoven, or a Michael Jordan.

Uniqueness defines the part of the socialization phase that plays an important role in our decision to become something. Uniqueness is who we are, where we come from, and what we have learned. Previous research has neglected to explore various features of the role of environment in becoming a songwriter. In an article by Feldman (1968) there is more than a suggestion that causal explanations of becoming a heroin user can no longer be explained by psychological or psychiatric theories of behavior. Feldman states that part of the causal explanation of drug use “should involve an understanding of his (the heroin user’s) immediate social context” (p. 131). In other words, environment has strong implications in determining whether someone becomes a heroin user. Feldman also implies a more specific uniqueness of becoming a heroin user in terms of personality. “Emotional pathology does little to explain how a large minority become drug addicts while others, often members of the same family, do not” (Feldman 1968, p. 131). If there is some “uniqueness” to becoming a heroin user, there could also be a similar “uniqueness” to becoming a songwriter or ballerina. Finally, Feldman (1968) provides sufficient evidence to suggest that environment and personality, both of which make each of us unique, are very powerful influences on the process of becoming a heroin user, therefore implying a need to explore these factors when researching other social roles.

What if one wanted to be a billfisherman? In a study conducted on becoming a billfisherman Kitner and Maiolo (1988) discovered a very important aspect of understanding the social context of billfishing. The initial step is finding out “how a person is first attracted to a new cultural pattern” (p. 215). For this answer Kitner and Maiolo used a model by Prus called “initial involvement” (Prus 1984, p. 215). Prus (1984) suggests that the process of involvement in a new

behavior can be broken down into three or four different types. The first type is called “seekership.”

Seekership is “a self-defined attraction towards, or fascination with, a particular phenomenon” (Prus 1984, p. 216). Songwriters, for whatever unique reasons, are attracted to writing and performing music, and certainly they are fascinated with what the ultimate achievements can be in songwriting. Kitner and Maiolo, in their research on becoming a billfisherman, have explored some issues I believe to be crucial to understanding how we become something. Implying that becoming a billfisherman must be initiated by some exposure to it would strongly suggest that, in the case of songwriters, early environmental experiences could very well direct a person’s path in becoming a songwriter.

If I can become a marijuana user, I could probably learn to write songs. Most scholars would probably grimace at this suggestion. Howard Becker (1963) would suggest that if there exists some unpleasantness in becoming something, users or actors learn to redefine these unpleasantnesses as pleasurable. He may not agree that anyone who smoked marijuana could write songs, but he would agree that the processes of becoming something involves adapting self-perceptions to meet the needs of that social environment (Becker 1963). In another article by Becker (1973), he states:

Where people who engage in deviant activities have the opportunity to interact with one another they are likely to develop a culture built around the problems rising out of the differences between their definition of what they do and the definition held by other members of the society. They develop perspectives on themselves and their deviant activities and on their relations with other members of the society. (p. 81)

This paragraph implies that social actors have control over their roles as dance musicians or songwriters; therefore, as Becker (1973) suggests, they define what they do and act accordingly so their self-perceptions are consistent with what they

believe to be characteristic of songwriters or dance musicians. Becker's article clearly suggests the need for further research on self-perceptions during the process of becoming. It does not seem to be enough to know how we become something in relation to some social world, but we must also know why we do. Understanding why someone becomes a songwriter, a ballerina, or a fireman is not just about how other members of society see them but how they see themselves.

Actors in a social world require objects and acts that help them define their role as songwriters or rock musicians. I know that long hair is very characteristic of rock musicians. Does that mean that I have defined a rock musician if I am able to recognize certain commonalities among them? "No," says Bennett (1980) in his book, Becoming a Rock Musician.

Acts and objects are not endowed with intrinsic meanings; they are, instead, only as meaningful as groups care to make them.
(Bennett 1980, p. 3)

In other words, rock musicians define their own characteristics. They perceive themselves as being rock musicians with long hair so they become rock musicians with long hair; then, outside members of society associate rock musicians with having long hair. In this respect it is the self-perception of the rock musicians not society that defines the social world of rock musicians.

Bayton (1990), in a study on how women become musicians, investigates many of the problems women encounter as they become musicians and how those problems affect the socialization process of becoming musicians. Bayton uncovers some important insights into the structural factors that influence the self-identity of women who become musicians. Understanding how we become "something" depends on internal factors as well as the external ones examined in Baytons' study.

Society will certainly have some control over whom they accept as rock musicians as Bennett (1980) has suggested and whom they do not, but the initial characteristics are set by the actors who choose to play that social role. The actors' control of initial characteristics is another important implication that self-perceptions of social actors are more influential to the process of becoming something than is the society who demands commonalities among specific groups. I am not convinced it is society that sets the standard for certain social roles. Society could never have created the mold for Muhammad Ali or Eleanor Roosevelt. Eleanor may have started out to become First Lady; but because her self-perceptions were different from what society had conceived of a presidential wife, she became a great humanitarian.

How do we find out how Eleanor Roosevelt became Eleanor Roosevelt or how Irving Berlin became Irving Berlin? We search for the most appropriate and efficient way to provide us with the information we seek. In the succeeding chapter I will explore the methods for investigating the process of becoming a songwriter.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Bob Dylan (1963) wrote,

How many roads must a man walk down,
before they call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail,
before she sleeps in the sand?
How many times must the cannonballs fly,
before they are forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind.
The answer is blowing in the wind.

Through symbols Bob Dylan was communicating to his audience a need to question what was happening in society. Bob Dylan in his 1963 song, "Blowing In The Wind," interpreted behavior by writing a song that would encourage a generation of people to open their eyes and witness the effects of war on human life, thereby not only asking "Why is this happening?" but also "Why are we letting it happen?" Generally speaking, that is what sociologists do--question behavior; they just use a different "method."

A symbolic interactionist would assume that to analyze human behavior in specific social worlds one would need to observe, understand, and interpret the symbolic meanings that "emerge" over a period of time or, in the case of this study, during the process of becoming a songwriter. It is also important to an interactionist perspective to "capture variations in ongoing patterns of behavior that reflect these symbols, images, and conceptions of self" (Denzin [1970] 1978, p. 58). Denzin identifies seven methodological principles that must be addressed in order to analyze human interaction through the lens of a symbolic

interactionist:

1. Symbols and interaction must be brought together. (p. 60)

In relation to the process of becoming a songwriter, in this study I examined how the symbols and meanings of self-perceptions and early environmental experiences influenced the process and how those same symbols and meanings were reflected in the behaviors of the individuals who go through the process of becoming songwriters.

2. Because symbols, meanings, and definitions are forged into self-definitions and attitudes, the reflective nature of self-hood must be captured. (p. 60)

Because we define and redefine ourselves via the generalized other, in this study I also examined how the generalized other is reflected in the self-perceptions and environmental experiences of an individual who has chosen to become a member of the social world of songwriters. "The investigator must indicate how shifting definitions of self are reflected in ongoing patterns of behavior" (Denzin ([1970] 1978, p. 60). In other words, as songwriters alter their self-perceptions, they exhibit similarities in choosing to become songwriters and going through the process of becoming songwriters.

Realizing that self-perception and environmental experience is not a complete synthesis of someone who becomes a songwriter I am hopeful that the focus of this study has helped to show the importance of the two factors in determining why one individual becomes a songwriter and another individual becomes a congresswoman. As a consequence, in this study I viewed the process through the eyes of the "comeees."

3. The investigator must simultaneously link man's symbols and conceptions of self with the social circles and relationships that furnish him with those symbols and conceptions. (p. 61)

Becoming a part of any social world requires previous symbols and meanings to

interpret the desire to initiate membership. Given that the family is the primary defining agent of symbols and meanings, I have “linked” the process of becoming a songwriter to social circles that influenced self-perception and early environmental experiences. And, as the individual goes through the process of becoming a songwriter, self-perception and environmental experiences play a significant role in how the songwriter redefined himself or herself. “Too frequently failure to achieve this link leaves studies of human conduct at an individualistic level, and as a consequence the impact of broader social structure on subjects’ conduct can be only indirectly inferred” (Denzin [1970] 1978, p. 61).

4. Any society provides its member with a variety of behavior settings within which interaction can occur; therefore, research must consider the “situated aspects” of human conduct. (p. 62)

W. I. Thomas (1972) identified the concept of “definition of the situation,” which explains the process of interpretation. Society becomes possible by the constant defining of situations. Behavioral interaction is contingent upon the “situated aspects,” or how actors define their situation depends on the setting in which they find themselves. Songwriters will define themselves in relation to their situation. The process of definition (via two factors) was the focus of this research.

5. Research methods must be capable of reflecting both stable and processural behavioral forms. (p. 62)

The main focus of this research has been to examine the “processural and stable” behavior of becoming a songwriter. What are the sequences or models of causation that might help to explain the differences or similarities in self-perceptions and environmental experiences when one chooses to become a songwriter? How have these two factors influenced, altered, or directed the process of becoming a songwriter?

6. The act of engaging in social research must be seen as a process of symbolic interaction, that being a scientist reflects a continuous attempt to lift one's own idiosyncratic experiences to the level of the consensual and the shared meaning. (p. 63)

Conducting in-depth interviews was my choice of method for studying the process of becoming a songwriter. As I used the in-depth interview, my choice of action reflects my own symbolic meaning of interpreting the process of becoming a songwriter. The application of symbols allowed me to interact with my environment because, as I conducted my research, I continually assessed and reassessed their meanings, thereby modifying their ability to be understood or to be "consensual."

7. From the interactionist's perspective the proper use of concepts is at first sensitizing and only later operational; further, the proper theory becomes formal; and last, the proper causal proposition becomes universal and not statistical. (p. 64)

The process of becoming a songwriter could not be easily defined by someone who is not going through the process; therefore, I could not provide meaning to the process until I learned what it means to those persons who were going through it. Once I understood that songwriters have self-perceptions different from those of doctors, for example, I could then use the method of interviewing to measure why self-perceptions may have affected the process of becoming a songwriter differently than it would affect the process of becoming a doctor.

Denzin ([1970] 1978) provided excellent methodological principles for using symbolic interactionism as the tool for understanding the process of becoming a songwriter. Defining each principle as it would relate to the process of becoming a songwriter has given a clear qualitative approach to the methods used in this study.

Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to "get close to

the data,” thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself. (Filstead 1970, p. 6)

The in-depth interview provides the richness of information that would not otherwise be provided by a quantitative approach. The purpose of this study was to examine the process of becoming a songwriter via self-perceptions and early environmental experiences. The questionnaire guide is comprised of questions within each of these two areas: self-perceptions and early environmental experiences.

The target population for this research was songwriters. Songwriters are individuals who either write just lyrics, compose just music, or do both. The songwriters this study is focused on are the songwriters who write lyrics and/or compose the music to their lyrics. The reason for this focus is not necessarily to exclude some songwriters but to provide for this research a group of individuals who are as similar in songwriting abilities as possible. Songwriters who specifically compose music or specifically write lyrics are not those songwriters who were performing only their own material and were, therefore, somewhat harder to locate. The majority of songwriters “pitch” their own material, lyrics and music. The majority of songwriters who “pitch” or sing their own material in “pitch places” were easy to locate because being found is the goal of most songwriters.

The only criterion the subjects had to meet was that of performing songs, previously or presently, at venues that represent the symbol of “pitch places.” It was also acceptable to include a songwriter who has “pitched” at one time but now has a publisher who “pitches” the songwriter’s material to established singers. Songwriters were not hard to find. Sometimes locating one songwriter provided leads to other songwriters.

Venues were not hard to find either. "Pitch places" are heavily advertised bars that songwriters use as a means to market their material. "Songwriters Night" is the key phrase to look for. When Songwriters Night is advertised, it symbolizes an atmosphere conducive to less drinking and more groveling. In other words, Songwriters night symbolizes a bar full of people with no money, just "wanna-be" success stories.

Musicville, USA provided a large pool of venues that offered one or even up to three Songwriter Nights in a seven-day period. In almost any venue it was quite certain that the night would be billed with songwriters from all levels. There were some differences among the venues in terms of music categories. I had decided, because Musicville is known for country music, that I would not allow more than 50% of the subjects to be specifically country and western songwriters. Glancing through a local newsletter assured me there were several music categories represented in Musicville.

Fifteen songwriters were interviewed. The songwriters were selected from two different sources. Twelve of the songwriters were chosen from referrals given to me by other songwriters. There were many referrals given to me, but I selected specific songwriters according to their demographic information. For instance, each songwriter categorizes himself or herself in certain music genres. I wanted to select a broad range of music genres so that the research could be representative of songwriters who wrote country songs as well as blues songs, or rock songs as well as folk songs. Two songwriters were chosen from bar type situations. The reason they were selected was due to their level of commercial success as songwriters. One songwriter was selected because of the relationship of that songwriter to me; he is my husband.

All fifteen songwriters lived within a fifty mile radius of Musicville. Only one of the fifteen songwriters was originally from Musicville. The remaining fourteen songwriters had relocated from other areas of the country, six from northern areas of the United States, and eight from southern areas of the United States.

Six of the songwriters are female, and all of the songwriters are caucasian. The songwriters range in age from 23 to 49 with a mean age of 37.8 years. Their day jobs ranged from bartender to contractor to model to studio musician (See APPENDIX C). All fifteen songwriters were writing, but not all were performing. Four of the fifteen songwriters seldom performed their own material in public.

The data were gathered by audio taping face-to-face interviews. Interviews lasted approximately two hours depending on the length of answers given by the respondents. Selection of subjects depended more on willingness to participate, availability of time, and demographics rather than random selection. Setting depended on the songwriters and whether they were willing to make an appointment for an interview. The preference of the researcher was that the "pitch places" be the setting for locating and approaching subjects and for scheduling interview appointments. Due to the noise level of the "pitch places" and the lack of privacy, interviews were not conducted there unless absolutely necessary. The interview setting was anywhere the level of noise was low enough to allow for ample recording of normal voice levels and anywhere there was sufficient privacy.

Collecting the data for this study was a tedious endeavor. It required patience and excellent listening skills. Many times the interviews were sidetracked into unrelated subjects. Nonetheless patterns did emerge. By allowing the songwriters to tell their stories in their own words, patterns emerged

through the words of the songwriters themselves. The similarities, then, were described from the memories and experiences of each individual songwriter.

Once the interviews were conducted, the answers were compared for similar experiences in early environment such as parents who sang or played musical instruments. The second comparison was to locate similar self-perceptions among the songwriters. Last, the songwriters were categorized into groups according to similar “songwriter” characteristics.

Methodology is an integral part of the research process. If a researcher has not chosen a method that will provide the type of information the study was designed to obtain, data can be misleading or, worse, misrepresented. The in-depth interview

enables the investigator to probe the intensity of an individual's feelings about a given social phenomenon, the intricacies of his definition of it, and how he relates it to other areas of his social life. (Wiseman and Aron 1970, p. 27)

Songwriters go through a process that might be similar or different from the process someone goes through to become a merchant marine, but what the in-depth interview provided was thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and definitions from the perspective of the person who went through the process. The songwriter's perspective is the only perspective that matters when researching what happens when he or she becomes a songwriter. Would you be interested in hearing Ronald Reagan tell you about the experiences of Michael Jordan, or would you prefer to have Michael Jordan to tell you about the experiences of Michael Jordan?

Research is about finding out. It is about learning of some part of society that we want to understand and explain. It is about social actors, and interviewing social actors can provide the richness of information we often seek.

So, as researchers, we set forth to discover that information. The information then becomes the breadth of our knowledge. In the following chapter I investigate what it was like for my respondents to grow up in songwriting environments.

CHAPTER V

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

Becoming a songwriter involves a process, a socialization process. The question is “When does the process begin and how much of that process is influenced by environment?” A distinction needs to be made between what we are born with and what external factors might influence us or direct us in some way towards a specific career path. Many of our Introductory Sociology texts explain it this way (Renzetti and Curran 1998):

Genetics undoubtedly play a critical role in laying the foundation of our individual human potential, but the extent to which we develop any of these traits or talents—competitiveness, say, or musical ability—has much, if not more, to do with the environment in which we live. (p. 103)

We have the human potential to be many things and it is genetics that provide the framework for what those things are, but how, why, where, and when those things or traits are developed become a product of the socialization process. How we are socialized, as we shall see, is greatly influenced, altered, and directed by the environment into which we are born. Again, our own Introductory Sociology texts provide a clear explanation (Renzetti 1998).

An individual may be born with musical talent, but the way that talent is expressed is limited to some degree by the culture into which the individual is born. (p. 110)

Becoming a songwriter, then, is very much a part of our socialization and like many roles we choose in life, it is influenced by our environment. How do we know the point at which the environmental influences begin to internalize into

the self? When do the meanings and definitions become interpreted into our own behaviors and self-perceptions? No research can ever pinpoint an exact date or time at which individuals begin to identify themselves as songwriters, but we can provide a time frame that helps to visualize a process that is similar for those individuals who pursue the path of a songwriter. It is the socialization process, beginning at birth, that will influence how we define our environment and ultimately how we internalize those meanings into our selves. It becomes our vision, our calling, that dominates our self-perception. It is what we believe we should be, where we are destined to go. In a basic way it is where our environment has led us via the symbols that we have internalized to be central to our own self-identity.

The Family Members

Our parents are our primary role models. They provide examples from which we learn how to address life situations. How they deal with stress becomes the model from which we draw as we deal with situational experiences. We watch them and we visualize ourselves handling a similar situation in much the same way. It is how our selves emerge. An individual who is part of an environment in which music is a major part becomes influenced by it as did every songwriter I interviewed. What part of the environment do the songwriters remember to be most important in influencing their own path to becoming a songwriter? Every songwriter was able to recall many of the musical influences in their environment, but we shall begin with whether or not their parents sang around the house.

My dad constantly sang. Always writing and every summer was either going on tour or getting to go to the clubs with my dad. I was kinda hexed with it, the family curse. There's a lot of people out there who don't wanna be like their father. To me that was like everything. And the band were my friends and my peers. His band, they were my heroes, my

Batman and Superman and all that stuff. (W.J.)

Dad did, of course. Yeah, in fact when I was really small I remember mom playing a guitar and singing and writing. She would bring me in her room and play me stuff she wouldn't for dad. (Maria)

All of the songwriters answered in a similar way. Listening to and being part of an environment where one or both of your parents sang had a very important effect on these would-be songwriters. These were special times and special memories that have stuck with these songwriters. From their earliest memories they have internalized a sense of bonding with their parents that has occurred within a musical format. They remember the singing at a very early age and whether or not their parents' singing was professional, it provided a special time for the would-be songwriters that they remembered to be positive enough to want to repeat in their own lives.

It was my time to sing with him. I think it helped boost my self-esteem a little. That's one of the few things dad and I did, write and sing together. (Ann)

Often, as children, we associate certain behaviors of our parents as their way of showing their love for us. Whether positive or negative, we internalize these behaviors as part of our own self-perception of who we are and want to be. Their behaviors produce nostalgia relating to our childhood memories, and regardless of whether those behaviors make us sad or happy, we remember them to be an important influence on who we have become. For a songwriter music becomes a symbol, a way to define emotion; and for children every aspect of their environment is defined by the relationship between an object and how that object makes them feel emotionally. Much like an individual who was abused in childhood, it is the emotional pain that is the hardest to disassociate because the definitions we attach to our emotions are so deeply ingrained. Nonetheless, we remember what it was that made us feel special or not so special, but those

memories become part of who we are and ultimately influence our path. It is easy to see, then, for a songwriter it is not just singing that has left an impression, but as in the case of all of the songwriters I interviewed, it is different elements of music. I inquired as to whether their parents played any instruments in school or around the house. Eleven of the fifteen songwriters said they did.

My mother played a little piano, and my dad picked up the guitar a little bit. But, my dad is an incredible singer, and my mother she's a real good singer, too. When we were little, every morning we would go get on my mother's bed, and she would teach us how to harmonize. We used to always sing in the car and stuff so we always learned harmonies. There was music going on all the time. (Caryn)

My father played lots of instruments. He was one of those guys who could pick up anything. He had those big construction worker hands, and he'd sit at a piano and just finesse it to death or on an accordion or guitar. If you left it around the house, in a couple of days he'd be playing it. He was blessed. (Frankie)

Many of us can remember if our parents had records they played as we were growing up. Songwriters go far beyond just the memory of their parents' music collections even though each of these fifteen songwriters say they remember in great detail the music collections that were played as they were growing up,

Yeah, my dad collected all the Beatles stuff, a lot of Buddy Holly records. Of course Lynyrd Skynyrd and ZZ Top. I never really did like Lynyrd Skynyrd, but one of my best friends was one of Roy Orbison's sons. (W.J.)

Yeah, we always had country music playing, old country stuff. I loved music. It moved me a lot because it was a big part of my life and my growing up and going through my teenage years so it became a very intricate part of my life. (Ann)

Only around Christmas time and my dad would occasionally drag out a Jim Reeves or Hank Williams album, but for the most part the musical influence was pretty much given to me by my brothers and sister. Mainly my brother, because we shared a room, and I fell asleep at night listening to the things teenagers listened to at that age so I got influenced by The Eagles, Jim Croce, and James Taylor. I fell asleep listening to whatever he played. (Kenny)

Whether it was Lawrence Welk or The Beatles, each of these songwriters was influenced by the sounds of music. Yet, it goes much farther than music collections. It is an environment based on the emotional aesthetics of music, and it goes very deep. The situation is the same as for a family whose family time is centered around athletics. Their grandparents, uncles or other relatives were deeply involved in sports, and if they are not playing them they are watching them. For these songwriters, their childhoods were centered around music. Music became the focal point.

Eleven of these songwriters have grandparents who provided another important environmental influence for them. In my experience, visiting my maternal grandparents on Sunday morning meant having to be subjected to that "Sunday Morning Czeck Party," a musical program on the radio. What is the difference between my experiences at my grandparents' house and the experiences at the homes of the grandparents of the songwriters I interviewed? It has to do with symbols and meanings. For me, the "Sunday Morning Czeck Party" was just a small part of my experience with my grandparents. My grandparents never sang, nor did they pull out any instruments to play. The "Sunday Morning Czeck Party" did not provide me a pleasurable enough experience to associate or influence me to repeat or recreate the feeling for myself at some later time in my life, but for the songwriters I interviewed, many experiences with their grandparents were embellished with musical influences. It is not about not wanting to go to grandma's to have to hear the "Sunday Morning Czeck Party" but "Can we go to grandma's so I can listen to her play piano." For the songwriters I interviewed their grandparent's influence was an extension of their socialization into music.

My grandparents were pretty musical. If that's where I got it from, it must of skipped a generation. My grandfather, I think, on my mom's side could play 5 or 6 different instruments, stringed and horned. I think that's probably where I got it from. (Tre)

My grandmother, my dad's mother, was actually an entertainer. She played piano and that's how she raised the children after WWII. We lost our grandfather, her husband, in WWII, and so she was an entertainer. So, it's really in the generations back that there's actually music business. My great-grandfather used to work for Irving Berlin and he also worked for RCA records. He was Hispanic so he would go and look for Hispanic artists and go all over the world for RCA. (Caryn)

For Angie the influence of her grandparents was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

My great-grandfather played the banjo and the guitar, and my grandmother played the piano, guitar, and sang. I remember more from my grandmother...growing up my grandmother loved country music, and I hated it. I thought it was the worst stuff to listen to, and we would go through town, and she would have the country station on, and I would reach over and turn it to rock and roll. She passed away when I was a freshman in high school, and that is when I started getting into it (country music). That was her dream to have someone in her family sing country music. Now when I sing, I really feel like I'm doing it for her.

Our grandparents are a very special part of our memories as children, and the images that we associate with those fond memories stay with us forever. They become a part of our self-image and an integral part of the person that has been influenced by our relationship with these very special people. Therefore, the part of our self that emerges from these experiences with our grandparents is most definitely influenced by the meanings we have attached to them; songwriters are no exception. In Angie's case her influence to explore a talent in country music may have been triggered by the loss of her grandmother. In other words, listening to or singing country music was a way to bring back her grandmother; someone she missed very much. Sometimes in our lives we are taken away from those people who have influenced us in childhood; and, for whatever reasons, we can no longer be a part of their lives. So, when we find

ourselves missing those persons or that person, we seek out any medium that can provide us the opportunity to feel the emotion we felt while we were with those persons. The primary medium that can provide that emotional sentiment is the music. It is the music that provides us with a sense of existence in time and space.

Another important factor for songwriters is whether or not any of the songwriter's parents had written music or poems. Being able to express oneself in the literary form does not necessarily mean that genetics has provided that "framework" for you, but it does insinuate a form of behavior that might come easier to some and not others. We are certainly aware that many of our great writers were not born great writers, but they developed into such as they practiced their writing skills. It is the behavior of choosing to express oneself through the written form, and even this behavior is not all inclusive. Music provides many avenues through which persons can express their talents, be it the written form, the lyrics, or the instrumental form which is the music. Either way the influence is there and is, in some instances, a powerful influence in the life of a would-be songwriter.

Music was played in my home on a regular basis. Music also provided an emotional outlet that could not be expressed in the spoken word, and I learned to use music in my own way as my voice about things that I was unable to speak or talk about. What was different about my experiences at home as opposed to one of the songwriters I interviewed? Music in the home of a songwriter is most often all encompassing. That is not to say that every songwriter experiences the exact same things, quite the contrary. The songwriters I interviewed, like all human beings, can never experience the same process of becoming anything; but for individuals whose self-identity falls under the same social roles, the things that

influence them to become “something” are very similar. In the case of songwriters it is the music. One songwriter is influenced heavily by music in the form of church. Another songwriter is influenced by his or her parents’ participation in a band. Three of the songwriters I interviewed spoke of the influence of their parents writing music.

My mother has attempted it and in fact my father’s a good writer, too, so he encouraged me to get into the songwriting and stuff. He always tried to instill in me when I was 16 or 17, “[Elvin] you have to have your own songs to succeed.” (Elvin)

My dad wrote songs. He’s had some cuts, but all of them have been independent cuts. He’s written a lot of good songs. He wrote one called, “I’d Like to Have an Alice Cowgirl Reject,” that we released in the late 70s that was pretty big regionally. (Pierce)

My dad has written songs when he was a teenager. He would start writing, and it just came out of him. That’s how it kinda was with me. I know for him it was his life, too so it was really important. I don’t know if he ever wrote poetry, per se, but he wrote songs. Oh yeah, Leif Garrett did one of his songs. He had a fit one day. He came in from the mailbox. BMI had sent him his first check since the cut. It was the first quarter, and they were expecting the money, and it was over ten grand, and he just cried. It was just amazing. (W.J.)

The parents’ musical influences were very important to these songwriters. The primary role models of each of these songwriters were in some way characterized by music, whether singing, playing an instrument, or, in many of the cases, both. Their primary role models provided an environment enriched with musical experiences, not only in their immediate environment but through religious organizations and parental occupations and associations. Adding to this flood of musical influences was the role of the grandparents and how important their musical abilities and talents were in influencing the types of definitions these songwriters internalized. A pattern emerges as each generation exhibits some form of musical ability, but it is how each individual interprets that experience that influences whether they, the songwriters, begin and engage in the part of the

socialization process they themselves control.

The Individual

When does a child begin internalizing environmental influences, and will there be a point at which a child will begin to exhibit some of the behaviors that have been present in his or her environment? For three of the songwriters musical lessons were forced upon them, and for three others it was a choice. Did being forced to take some type of musical lessons discourage any of the songwriters? Not in the case of W.J.

I was forced to take piano lessons, and I quit 'cause it was not my instrument. It might have been if I wasn't forced to do it. I remember getting spankings at the piano if I played something wrong. It was that kind of discipline with music. I ran from that and took to guitar and hid in closets and played till my fingers bled.

W.J. even went on to play a musical instrument in school. In some respect music became such an integral part of his self that even a negative musical experience would not necessarily turn him away from pursuing a career in music. Three of the songwriters had similar experiences.

I wouldn't say I was forced to take lessons, but I was encouraged to take lessons in the first grade, and so for about 6 months in the first grade I studied guitar. I hated it the whole time, but now I think that's probably where the seed was implanted. (Kenny)

I played the tuba. I always liked music, and actually my step-mother influenced me with other instruments as I got older. So yeah, I'm sure it influenced what I am today. (Michele)

I started playing piano when I was three, a little toy piano, and I used to teach myself how to play. And then, I used to beg for piano lessons. At ten I started taking formal lessons. and my mother wouldn't buy a piano. We had a neighbor that let me come over and practice at their house. She said if you show me that your really interested and you really want this, then, you'll get your piano later and I never missed a day. (Caryn)

Playing a musical instrument in school was not an experience for every one of the songwriters, but in some form each of the fifteen songwriters played a

musical instrument whether at home via “lessons” or in school as part of the school band. In retrospect, it is the beginning of a “joint” control by the individual and by his or her environment. We can see that some of the songwriters have been controlled by their environment through their parents forcing them to partake in some form of musical lessons. At the same time the songwriters were in control of their environment by expressing some emotion relating to that experience of “lessons.” In other words, even though they were forced to take lessons, they were able to regain some of the control society had over them, thereby influencing the direction they would eventually take in becoming a songwriter.

There were other choices to be made by the would-be songwriters. At every school, at every grade level, there are always choirs. Many of us were required to participate in choir in our elementary years, but for some, like me, it was fun only if I did not have to do a solo part. For nine of the songwriters I interviewed choir was a choice for them and one which most certainly provided an outside avenue to develop one's potential.

I remember having a music teacher back then, and I asked him about playing a guitar in the school band, and to him that was like a no-no. In fact he came so far as not even considering it a musical instrument. I was kinda shocked and put back by it, but I do remember in high school on Long Island they had a thing called the Boys' Room Choir 'cause we all used to hang out in the boys' room singing so my teacher decided to start a real formal boys' room choir, and we sang for the shows and stuff, and it was do-op kinda stuff. It was great. (Frankie)

I was in the Glee Club and I was in the Junior High band. I broke my arm so I couldn't play the coronet for eight weeks; and by the time I recovered from that and got the cast off, my lip was gone. (Lefty)

I always sang in chorus, and I always sang in the church choir. We had a youth choir at our church, and we sang in different places all over the South in a church bus. About 25-30 kids. (Renni)

Participation for many of these would-be songwriters is part of the process over which the songwriter controls. It is a choice that they make, yet the choice is never entirely free of the influence of their environments. The individual who chooses to be a member of the school band or choir and not a member of the football team has made a clear choice to pursue an interest. The interest comes from an environment laced with certain experiences and influences. In other words, it becomes something we know, something we are used to and around which we are comfortable. As we were growing up, the "something" was ever present, and it is that "something" we come to identify in our own self-image as coexisting with the many influences we remember as part of our early environment. It reminds me of an old saying my grandfather used to say to me when I would talk about going to the big city, "You can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl." The things we grow up with remain with us, and the influences of those things in childhood are hard things to shake. Even though we would like to believe that our childhood influences are no more than that, just influences, they are as much a part of us as our blue eyes or brown hair. For a songwriter, it becomes a "natural" road to travel.

Creative Expression

Could writing songs be influential enough to be repeated in a similar way by the songwriters themselves? I asked them, as I asked about their parents, if they ever write or had written poetry or literary works.

Yeah, actually I used to before I really had any ability in music. I could always go sing with Dad, and he would play for me, but at the time I didn't know much about the guitar or anything so a lot of lyrics would go on paper. (Maria)

Nothing ever published but I actually set out a couple of times to try and write short novels. The first one I started was kinda

weird, twisty thing drawing on my experience of Southeast Asia so what I found is writing like that is why I came to Nashville, to learn to write better. I used to write a lot just rambling, now I try to make it go where I intend it to go. (Frankie)

Off and on from 13 to 15 I'd write little things. When I could play my first couple of chords, I put them to music. (Tre)

For these songwriters, as is the case for ten of the other songwriters, writing poems or short stories or any literary work was the beginning of the process from which they became directed towards becoming songwriters. It is the initial stage in the process of the would-be songwriters to exhibit a behavior conducive to the social world of songwriters. Their environments have been flooded with singing, the playing of instruments, records and musical programs, and sooner or later the opportunity or interest will emerge to "try their own hand" at music. As "natural" as it may be for a would-be songwriter to create in some form, like everything else it takes practice, but it is a beginning from which many of these songwriters learn that music is "in their blood."

That to me is part of myself that I've got to have a hold of and if I don't exercise that or stay in touch with that part of myself over a period of time, I literally start going crazy. I really do. It's a need just like you gotta have water. I have to have a creative outlet. It's just an absolute necessity for me. (Jay)

It's like no matter how old you get that art form flows in your blood. And you're always...I don't know what it is. It's almost like your mind takes life situations and puts it in song form, and you can't really help it. You can't stop it. It happens anyway. (Tre)

Has to do with I have to do it. I walk around doing it all day. I mean I see things and I feel things. I mean I could write this or do that, and so I'll always do that [songwriting]. It's just my padded cell. It's my way of cushioning me, maybe learning. (Frankie)

Of the five songwriters who explained songwriting as "in the blood," no one expressed himself or herself as well as Jay did about the relationship between their sense of self and music, but each of the five songwriters implied that music manifested itself as a need to create in some way. Jay's explanation did not focus on the origins of his need, therefore, suggesting that music is not external

to the self. To a songwriter music is part of his or her self-definition, part of who a songwriter becomes and who he or she will always be.

Can our sense of self be interrupted or altered if we are discouraged from what we believe to be our “natural” path? Can a child who has been bombarded with images of criminal behavior be discouraged from pursuing a life as a criminal just by being discouraged from doing so? I asked each of the fifteen songwriters if their parents had discouraged them from songwriting. Thirteen of the fifteen songwriters said that they had never been discouraged from writing songs. The majority of the songwriters had very supportive parents. The two who had been discouraged from songwriting did not seem to be deterred by their parents’ lack of support. How could it be that the most important socializing agents, our parents, are not as influential as we assume they are? It is not that parents have no influence over us, as we would assume in the case of the two songwriters, but that parents provide their children with environments specific to their own values and that many times those values are not consistent with the behavior the parents exhibit within those environments. For example, a parent can preach all day long about the evils of drugs; but if that parent is a chain smoker, the child will internalize the behavior of the parent and not the words. For the child the words become the lie whereas the behavior speaks the truth. Children do not go on into adulthood modeling their parents’ words. They become adults modeling their parents’ behaviors. For the two songwriters who had been discouraged from songwriting, it would have taken parental behaviors uninfluenced by music to reinforce in these two songwriters that a musical path was unacceptable. This behavior becomes a powerful example of what many social behaviors, negative as well as positive, can do to the self as it emerges within every child during the socialization process.

Influences from Outside the Family

Sometimes influences on the individual may come from outside the family. Two of the songwriters I interviewed were raised in a religious background. Church provided a mixture of environmental influences. Church communities were and still are central to a family's belief system, and a form for expressing those beliefs is through song and music. In many cases the church choir was the first atmosphere in which the songwriter remembers his or her parents singing. The model of a church choir is somewhat analogous to a stage for which amateurs can try out their skills without having to worry about embarrassment or ridicule. A church choir does not necessarily provide a forum for songwriting, but it certainly has the power to influence someone to use music as an avenue for expression.

My parents were married 51 years. My dad just passed away on Easter this last year, and both of them raised me in a church. My father sang in church his whole life. He sang with people who sang gospel music. My dad used to lead the choir for nine years at the church I went to as a child. (Renni)

Church is not the only influence for a songwriter, but in some instances it became the pleasurable, maybe even respectable, avenue through which to develop talents or traits they possessed. Religion is undoubtedly characterized by the music with which we "beller out" our faith to a Higher Being. Our religious music allows us to express what it is we believe in, what it is we value in life and what behaviors we shall pass on to our children. Religion, therefore, is yet another powerful influence on an individual who already has the genetic make-up for a career in music.

Role Models Outside the Immediate Environment

The final environmental question addressed to the fifteen songwriters had to do with role models outside their immediate environments. Were there some

other individuals who may have influenced them to pursue a path as a songwriter, and if so, is there a meaning they attach to those individuals? All fifteen songwriters had some person, most often famous, whom they admired and aspired to emulate.

As far as writing I would say k.d. Lang, Bette Midler. They don't write all their own music, but it was their music that triggered something in me that made me want to create something like that. (Maria)

Oh boy, John Denver, the early Led Zeppelin stuff. The stuff that was kinda heavy in that time, Small Faces, Yard Birds, Springfield, Crosby, Stills and Nash. (Tre)

I really got into Gordon Lightfoot. He was one of my, aside from traditional country, favorites. Gordon Lightfoot was a major influence. Then, later on I got into Jethro Tull. I really like a lot of things that were unique and were different approaches to music. (Jay)

Songwriters are a product of many things, and like all social actors songwriters tend to characterize their “natural” paths with symbols of those people, places, and things that have moved them in some way. It is similar to the same way you or I might be influenced by the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. or a tragic event in our lives. There is a part of all of us, regardless of our own desires, that has been and will always be influenced by the environment into which we were born. It is a part of us that we never shed. It is a part of us that we can never change because it existed just as the self that emerged as a result of that environment. We become social actors in the vast pool of society, yet we retain a sense of uniqueness that defines the very essence of who we are and the path that seems “natural” for us to travel. Like each of the fifteen songwriters, they are similar because they have all been influenced by similar forces, but they are different because those forces have affected them and molded them into very different people. As we shall see, wanting to be a songwriter does not

necessarily mean that the process of becoming that songwriter is the same for everyone. It is the fact that we come from such very different places that initiates the need for us to feel like other people are similar to us in some way.

Environmental influences for all fifteen songwriters were present. Some influences consisted of parents and/or grandparents singing or playing musical instruments around the house. Other influences involved creative processes such as writing poems or short stories. The patterns that were most consistent were the ones that involved parents who either played instruments, sang around the house, and/or played music collections on a regular basis. These findings suggest that environmental experiences are very powerful influences on what social worlds we choose to become members of. They also suggest that environmental influences in childhood play a very important role in our self-perceptions.

In becoming a songwriter, then, we cannot investigate the process of becoming a songwriter without also taking into consideration how social actors perceives themselves as they become a songwriter. It is the self-perceptions of the fifteen songwriters that I will examine in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

SELF-PERCEPTIONS

Musical influences come in many forms, and all of the songwriters I interviewed do share some similar influences. However, the way in which they internalize those influences becomes important to the way in which they individually experience the process of becoming a songwriter. What does writing songs provide for them? What does it mean to write songs as opposed to operating on someone's heart? What are the definitions that individuals attach to writing songs?

In our pursuits to become something we all strongly believe that we are in control of our destiny. We believe that at any time we are capable of being anything our heart desires. Individual human potential is believed to be the starting gate where we all begin with the same abilities and the same opportunity to pursue our dream of being the next Michael Jordan. Is it fair to assume that every human being is in complete control of the self as it emerges through the socialization process? Can we assume that if we are in control of our path in life that we would all choose to be someone or something good and not the Jeffery Dahmers of society? The environment exercised strong control over the direction taken by the fifteen songwriters I interviewed. The way they chose to internalize that control becomes evident in their self-perceptions.

The Personality

What is personality and does it play a part in determining whether or not we

become a songwriter as opposed to a news reporter? Again, we rely on the basics of Introductory Sociology to provide us with a base from which to begin our search (Renzetti 1998).

Personality is a set of behavioral and emotional characteristics that describe one's reaction to various situations and events. (p. 102)

Personality, then, is constructed through our interactions within our environment. Our personality is that unique part of our identity that evolves from the influences of environment on us and us on our environment. In other words, we are not born introverted. Our social worlds influence how we learn to react in, and to, certain situations, therefore, influencing us to become introverted in some situations while extroverted in others. Songwriters perceive themselves as having personalities conducive to what the role of songwriter requires. And as the songwriters tell their own stories, we shall see that for five of the songwriters, songwriting became a way for their introverted self to become extroverted.

I'm basically an extrovert when it comes to the kind of situations where you have to, like those relationships in the contractor business I own. You're an extrovert out there selling yourself. It's the same way when you're out conducting any kind of business as far as selling something or recording, wherever you have that kind of relationship sort of thing. Where I'm an introvert is on the creative side. (Jay)

I'm a forced extrovert. If I go to a party and I don't know anyone, I tend to hang out in the corner. I love to watch and listen. I'm not the kind of guy that jumps out in the middle and says, "Hey I got a joke for ya," although I love those kind of people cause I'm a great listener and I love to laugh, but I can jump in on a conversation if I have something to say. (Frankie)

It depends on what you're talking about. There are some things I keep to myself. I've developed a thing called Organized Schizophrenia. We all have it. There are places that I go that I show this face, and there are other places I go I show

another face, whatever's appropriate at the time. Generally speaking, people would see me as an extrovert, but there's a lot I keep to myself. I turn it on; I'm an entertainer (Caryn).

In the primary stage of the process of becoming a songwriter it is their environments that have influenced their "natural" path; but as each individual commences to attain the social identity of a songwriter, his or her own self-perceptions become a very important element in determining how the personality of a songwriter develops. Six of the songwriters' initial responses to whether they considered themselves an extrovert or introvert was an overwhelming response of "I'm an extrovert." One of the songwriters responded that he was an introvert. This songwriter seemed very sure of his introvertedness and understood that songwriting was his way to be extroverted. The remaining eight songwriters said that being introverted or extroverted depended on the situation. They described being private people in terms of the creative side but at some point had to become extroverted to deal with other aspects of their lives.

Seven of the songwriters I interviewed did not consider themselves popular in school. They were either unwilling or unallowed to participate in the popular group, but for many of the songwriters it was not that they were truly unwilling to or were unaccepted. It had more to do with their own self-perception.

No. I was a nerd, picked on a lot. Not really an outcast but different. [Teenage years] were difficult, troubled. I dropped out of school. Just wasn't my bag. (Tre)

I never felt I was popular. I was, I guess, always felt kinda. I don't think I was [an] outcast, but I always felt like I was an outsider, a loner or something. I felt different like I didn't belong. (Ann)

I was very much an introvert. I just kinda kept to myself...So I kind of didn't relate well with my other peers. I was very much to myself type of person. (Elvin)

I didn't really let myself go until I got to 19 years old. I was real shy when I was young. (Renni)

Our self-perceptions during our teenage years are very important to us, and that self-perception influences everything about us--how we dress, act, everything. Our self-perception becomes reflected in our everyday behaviors. It becomes our personality, and we perceive our personality to be the part of us that either turns people away or draws people to us. Many times we seek out our own little circle of "like" friends, and we become popular within that group.

Yeah, but I don't understand why. I was a little geek, but yeah I was. I never felt like I didn't have any friends or people didn't like me. (Maria)

In my circle, you know, we had like most high schools, you know, you have peer stratification's. We were probably bottom tier, but in my group I was popular. (Lefty)

Songwriters are no different from other individuals in terms of growing up as confused about life as are all the rest of us. We all want to be accepted, and songwriters are quick to notice that the "in" group is not theirs, but they are also quick to accept that fact. They find their niche; and when they do, their self-perception becomes much clearer to them.

Songwriters, then, do have a certain amount of control over their "natural" path, but what we have seen from many of these songwriters is that personality, or what one perceives to be his or her personality, greatly influences whether someone becomes the next Bob Dylan or remains an average Joe.

The Songs and Venues

Songs tell us a lot about ourselves. For someone who writes songs they tell a story. Sometimes the story is about external things; most often, though, the story comes from an internal place within the vision of its creator. Visions are the self-perceptions of someone who experiences some piece of life and wishes to have that experience reflected back to him or her. "Here is what I feel. Do you feel it too?" A song, then, becomes a way to communicate emotion, and for

songwriters their ability to communicate through music provides them a process from which they can grow, learning not only about the world around them but about themselves as well. It is a visual, tangible piece of their history at which they can look and that they can follow while witnessing their own progression and maturity. It is a process from which the self, the self of a songwriter, emerges. Through their own creations songwriters can observe the changes that occur as they become and identify themselves as songwriters.

Everyone chooses to pursue a path in life because it provides to him or her some sense of rightness. In other words, it feels right. We may not acknowledge that “sense” until later, but nonetheless our path becomes a “natural” one. For songwriters the first few steps on the “natural” path have a self-perception much different from the self-perception of a “seasoned” songwriter. Three of the songwriters I interviewed can recall the self-perceptions that they believe directed them towards a career in music.

When I was younger it was my troubles that were happening and not everybody else's. It seemed like a different type of thing. Things would always come up and music was my way of sheltering myself, being on my own. (Tre)

By the time I hit high school I'd had enough of the system. I was figuring out the real function of education was not to create independent thinkers....I was a like a round peg in a square hole. Music was the only thing that I could see that would really allow you to be yourself. (Jay)

I could be painfully shy when I was real young, and this was my escape route, my padded cell. Oh man, and the Ricky Nelson Show. Remember how he would come out after the show and sing. That's why I started a band....the screaming girls. I always had a band in school. (Frankie)

Not all of the fifteen songwriters had the same self-perceptions, but it is not the similarities that are important. The important point is that every songwriter

began the process of becoming a songwriter with a self-perception that changed as their experiences and influences changed.

Our self-perceptions are powerful influences on the direction of future behaviors. What we believe our self to be defines the behaviors that we exhibit. As long as those behaviors are consistent with our own perception of who we are or wish to be, we will continue to travel that path. Songwriters, like all human beings, have a self vision. It is not always a vision we draw out or plan in a scholarly way, but it is what we believe to be part of the person we were destined to be. Many of us never get there. Many of us never quite had a clear vision of life in the first place, let alone our place in it; but we all perceive that plan, that vision; and it is that self vision that gives us hope. Even for a songwriter, hope is all a part of meeting the expectations of society as well as the expectations of our own self-perceptions.

Becoming a songwriter implies that an individual must change from being one thing to becoming another. Is it the self-perception that must change or is it a whole new set of behaviors we must learn? I asked each of the fifteen songwriters what is different now from when they first started playing out.

I think when I first started I wanted to be the singer, the front person. I wanted to be the one up on stage under the lights. Now I've decided there's other ways to go, and I realized that songwriting is the better avenue for me. (Michele)

I think probably the biggest difference is I think differently. I think in a different way than I thought before. It just comes from being 44 and having gone through a lot of living and through a whole lot of experiences...struggling to survive and trying to keep one foot in music the whole time. There's just been a sense of having lived a lot longer. A lot of smoke clears after awhile. When you're younger, you're so philosophical and introspective. You get smarter. You become more realistic. (Jay)

The basic change for the songwriters is not their mask, but a more realistic view of their own self vision. It would not seem that becoming a songwriter requires a whole new game plan at all, but the process is more analogous to a revision of what was “naturally” there in the beginning. For some songwriters music may have begun as an answer to a teenage dilemma, and from this perspective it is important to understand that it was the music that became the desired tool that these individuals chose to use in addressing that teenage dilemma. It is how we behave in certain circumstances that defines our personality, and we know from our basic sociological information that personality “develops in response to socialization” (Renzetti 1998, p. 103). So, an individual who chooses to respond to introversion with some component of music has been socialized to respond in that way, much the same as a child has learned that violence is how to deal with anger. We learn what we live; it just does not come to light until we can reflect upon it. It occurs, as Jay says, when the “smoke clears.”

What can we say about the places we choose to express ourselves? What do they mean to songwriters and how do they influence their self-perceptions? When interviewing the fifteen songwriters I got the distinct impression that the venues they played in did not define their role as songwriters, but certainly influenced their level of self-esteem and confidence, which ultimately influences self-perception.

Just growing up I sang in church, and I sang in a lot of functions that my dad would have at the store. My mom and dad had a little store. A lot of people change you...I said I would never sing in a bar. Singing in a bar is different than what most people think. I don't go out and make money at a bar every night, but some are nice. (Angie)

I played nightclubs, lots of Columbus Halls, convention halls, civic center halls. They've changed. Now it's starting to

get back up there. I'm starting to branch out into playing other places like downtown, but for awhile it was beer joints. I'm working on getting into bigger venues. (Elvin)

When I first started, I played a pizza joint. We started the music down in Guido's Pizzeria. They didn't have music in there until I talked the guy who owned it into letting me setup in the corner. It was the only place I could get a beer; I was underage. Now I couldn't even get in there without a tape. (W.J.)

Four of the songwriters did remember the early places they played in as enjoyable places, places where they were less concerned about talent and more about having fun. In the beginning their self-perceptions were more simplistic and short-term. In the beginning it was a time for experimentation rather than competition, for learning how to party rather than make a living; but when I asked the songwriters what changed first for them, the types of places they played in or they themselves, almost every songwriter talked about the change in himself or herself.

I changed because I was playing a lot of beer joints, and I was drinking kinda heavy, and I was doing the narcotic thing and now I'm doing it straight up. The clubs are better, but its getting harder to get in them. Now that I'm dealing with life straight up I'm wanting to get away from those beer joints, and get to a better level. I guess I could say I changed first. (Tre)

I would say probably me. I think I grew up a little bit maybe realizing I wasn't getting anywhere in those beer joints. I think those kind of places were trouble for me than to go to the places I go now. (Michele)

I did; because if you don't get better, then you won't get a chance to go to better venues unless you're lucky. (Austin)

Life is full of changes, and as human beings we go through life welcoming some changes while evading others. Many of us accept that we grow older, and we also accept that we can no longer "party like fools." The hardest part is watching those youthful days pass into memories in a scrapbook. The experience is the same for a songwriter. There comes a time when the

songwriter realizes that change is inevitable if he or she is to succeed. No one can party every single night, and sooner or later that wake-up call comes. To pursue a career in the music industry requires responsibility, and a lot of the time it is the responsibility that narrows the “natural” path. The will is still there, the desire has remained, but the goals have changed. The only way you can change the game plan is to change the way you perceive yourself to exist within the process of achieving those goals. Sometimes the process is a difficult and fearful transition, and we cannot help but acknowledge those individuals who “partied until the cows came home” and still made millions. But even Eric Clapton would probably agree that partying is not the avenue to success.

The Significant Other

How much influence does a significant other have on the self-perception of a songwriter? Those people closest to us are the ones who not only influence our path in life but also influence the deepest images we have of ourselves. Those images manifest themselves in the many behaviors that result in our successes and our failures. There is none so powerful an influence as the influence of those people we believe to love us, and it is within the context of that love that we find the mirror that projects back to us our own self-worth.

Dreams become reality because we feel ourselves worthy of pursuing those dreams, but without the support of those people we love many times our self-worth goes invalidated and our dreams become the sacrifice.

Every songwriter I interviewed had been influenced by some significant other, some negative, others positive. As we shall see, the differences between them are reflected in their self-perceptions as they describe the ways their significant others affected their songwriting.

Experiences in our relationship, as far as them helping write

music or I think just the train of thought I have when I go into the studio. I know whether a song is good for me or not. A good time with my boyfriend or a bad one. It can really change you. My first relationship I worried about the breakup and how it was gonna affect me and recording. I just really had to stay focused. I couldn't let my personal life interfere with what I was doing. (Angie)

She writes lyrics for me. She supports me, helps me get all my material together. You've got something, and when you've got someone to stand beside you, help push ya. Sometimes it's kinda difficult, 'cause you don't see eye to eye, but you gotta have that little butting of the heads. (Tre)

I had one (a girlfriend), made me feel really uncomfortable. I've learned. I've dated a singer, and I'm now trying to break up with a songwriter girl right now. I've written with her. I don't want to write with her. I don't want to share that with her. I don't want my girlfriend to have anything to do with music. (W.J.)

One of the songwriters chose to give up his relationship as opposed to his self-perceptions of being a songwriter. One might conclude that the self-perception formed in the early environment took precedence over one that a latter significant other tried to impose. This finding becomes another very important insight into the significance of environment on the self as it emerges in childhood.

Certainly we could assume that there are events songwriters experience or are part of that cry out for them to write, write, write. Then, there are some situations that many of us, not just songwriters, would rather suppress into nonexistence than share with the rest of humanity. The question is how do such life occurrences change the self-perceptions of songwriters? Do they become more productive from an event that encourages a more positive self-perception? I asked each songwriter if there were any events that affect his or her productivity.

Yeah, mostly just things that have changed the way I see things. A lot of things people go through when they grow up. You change your views on things. You know, life is

what forms your opinions and beliefs so there's definitely been things that affect the way I write. (Maria)

Yeah, growing up. I mean different parts of my life, listening to music all my life. The different styles of music that have come out. My 39 years of living, being open-minded. You take a little bit of this from that performer and a little bit of that, mix it with your own style, your own influences, it's what's coming out of your head. (Tre)

Some human beings including songwriters are profoundly affected by those people closest to them and by the events that encompass their life space. In the end the best we can hope for is that the people we love will in return love us enough to support us and validate us in the pursuit of our own dreams.

The Statements

What motivates someone to become a songwriter? What is the message of songwriters? It is the same as that of any human being. It is wanting to be heard. It is a "statement" influenced and derived from the places they have been and the places they are going. The business of songwriters is to communicate so that their statements go far beyond their immediate circles. Their statements are to be heard by the world, and they intend for them to be heard; but it is not a message that says, "Here I am." It is a message that says, "I am, and I feel; feel with me."

All of the fifteen songwriters were asked what they want to say through songwriting. Half of them answered the question long before I asked them. For a songwriter it is not so much what they are saying but that, whatever it is, it is getting said. All of us have thoughts, emotions, or things we carry around that are waiting to be expressed, things that have to be said. Songwriters use music as their most comfortable way to say their thoughts, their feelings, much the same way you or I speak or write letters. For whatever reasons, some songwriters feel inhibited about the spoken word and choose to use an avenue a bit more

“natural” to them--music. Songwriting becomes their way to express, and they are expressing themselves about the same thing we all express ourselves about--life.

I express myself in a way. Sad songs are probably my favorite. But she [Dolly Parton] would sing songs about her family, and how she was raised. I had a really good home life, and I'm a family-oriented person. I would always try to express my feelings in that. Now my singing's changed somewhat. It's about cheating, going out, a single women. All that nice stuff. (Angie)

Well, the main thing was release. It was to get that emotion out of me, to make me feel a little better. Now, it's getting other people to listen to what I've gone through and how I feel and making sure they feel the same emotions I do. (Tre)

One of the songwriters spoke very eloquently about the “naturalness” of communicating through music.

I didn't have any big motive of something to say. It's just that I think art is cool stuff. When you read a novel that's well written or a poem that's well done, it does something. It communicates in a way that's beyond just straight words, beyond symbols. And it's something I love to do. I love to create. To me you can express anything that way. You can take any subject, any situation, any circumstance, any kind of scene. You can take the smallest little thing, and you can communicate what it is. A song about one tear drop. It can be about anything. It can be about a hot rod car; and if it's put together right and it's clever, somehow there's a key that's undefinable. I don't know what it is exactly. You can't quite analyze it, but there are certain things that communicate with people. Rhythms communicate to people. Melodies communicate with people. Tones communicate different things to people. Ya know Joe Cocker with his voice communicates entirely different than Celine Dion. Right there it's like a kaleidoscope. (Jay)

Music is the universal language after all, and it has become so because certain people can take a sound, a thought, or an emotion and communicate it in such a way that you feel as if it were your own. Those people are the songwriters. They are the connections that bind us to each other as emotional human beings. Songwriters are the fabric of change, and with each song they permit us to reflect upon our mistakes as well as our perfections. It is the

songs that permit us to feel similar to one another even though we are all very different indeed.

There is no question that songwriters can make a substantial amount of money writing and communicating through music, and three of the songwriters said that money was their prime objective. Yet, even for them songwriting is in some way their “natural” path to tell the rest of society whatever it is they want them to know even if their message is about money. Money is just a benefit of being a good songwriter, and to rely on songwriting to pay the bills you become your own song--that one in a million.

The ultimate gains from songwriting, as expressed by the songwriters, sounded very similar to the messages they were trying to convey through their songs. It is what they feel that they wish to say. What they wish to gain is to have other people feel what it is that they feel. Songwriters are not complicated people, nor are they unable to talk as I am talking to you. What sets them apart is that they are gifted. Their gift may not have been placed under a Christmas tree and their gift may not always have resulted from positive surroundings, but it is a gift nonetheless, and it provides them a sense of immortality. Even more profound, their gift provides them the ability to reach beyond their own heart and into the many hearts that cannot speak for themselves. For that, I am sure many of us are eternally grateful.

The Success

How do we define success? Do we define success differently when referring to family roles as opposed to occupational ones? Do we see success as an internal reward, or are we manipulated by the definition provided to us by society? In previous chapters we have discussed whether the decision to become something is jointly controlled by us and by our environment. Our

environment has led us to our “natural” path, and we have made a decision to continue to travel that path, thus, the joint control. Could we, then, also assume that the definitions we attach to social life are equally and jointly influenced?

In the social world of songwriters success has many different definitions, but the most common definition is the one upon which almost every songwriter agreed. Success as a songwriter is not always about money. It is not always about recognition. It is about how they perceive themselves in the context of any social world in which they just happen to be songwriters. I asked them whether or not they considered themselves successful songwriters.

I do for me because I write for myself. It all started when as a singer I knew what style I wanted to pull from, what styles to create something unique, and it's like there's all these artists I love. And I love their songs, but that's not the way I'm going to get anywhere so I started pulling from all of that and that's kinda how I got where I'm at. It's successful to me because I'm satisfied. It feels good to me. (Maria)

I've sort of stumbled into a few successes, but not nearly like I want. Although there's two sides of it. One is you are writing songs, and you feel good, and you like your learning, and you're moving ahead. That has nothing to do with the business, the music business. That has to do with if you feel like you're getting better. And, as long as you're getting better, there's a side that says you're successful. (Frankie)

Many of us would consider ourselves successful even though our bank accounts are far from impressive. Many of us would consider ourselves successful whether we were princes or paupers. That is the whole point of what this research is about--what certain individuals perceive. In the final analysis it really does not matter what everyone else perceives. It is not other people's perception by which we live. I will agree that our environment has a certain amount of control over our self-perception and that our environment influences and manipulates that self-perception, but it is our own reflection we see in the mirror everyday, not the reflection that society has perceived of us. Only our

self-perception is true reality because no other human being can experience my reality as I do; therefore, no other human being can assume he or she knows me better than I know myself. The self-perception of songwriters is possible only through their own eyes. If they define success via their self-perception, who are we to say differently. We cannot.

Success, then, is about a sense of accomplishment for having matured as a songwriter. Success is about having accomplished something someone said you could not, and it can be as simple as stepping up to a microphone. Success is about being comfortable with who you are regardless of whether you are paid to be so. Success is about growing as a human being and understanding that life is what you make of it. Success is about being--being what you perceive yourself to be. That is success to a songwriter. That is success to us all.

Finally, I asked each songwriter what level they hope to reach as a songwriter, and the replies were ever so humbling.

I wanna reach the level where I'm just comfortable. I've hit the level. I've played the biggest places. We've raised a five million dollar corporation. It's incredible. Something that, unfortunately, destroyed my family. I don't think I ever want to go back.
(Austin)

Just that...of getting better and better with songwriting, singing and guitar playing, the things I love and hope that I can keep doing. But, I think a joyful life is more important. I think maybe by realizing that those other things will get better on their own; and if all fell apart tomorrow and I had to get a job at Sears, maybe I'd be OK. A lot of people haven't been lucky enough to do some of the things I got to do, and there are people who've done a lot more that I would love to do so I'll just keep plugging away towards the things I want to do and not be too embarrassed by the things I have done. (Frankie)

I'll have hit songs but as long as I am true to myself I don't care how many sells or (are) made. I would like to think I can get to the point where it's commercial enough that people will buy it, but if it don't it doesn't mean I haven't been successful.(Kenny)

Songwriters, we must remember, are at the bottom in terms of visibility and recognition in the music industry. Their efforts often go unrewarded unless they have managed to write that “one in a million,” so most songwriters are not characterized as starry-eyed about their profession. They are most often sensitive, self-directed individuals. Songwriters are not looking to write the next “White Christmas.” They are looking for what we all look for--a place in society in which we can be appreciated for who we are and what it is we can contribute to the betterment of humankind. Not all lyrics have to be profound for a songwriter, but the lyrics do have to be worthy of being said. Frankie said it very well.

I like to feel I know what I am saying rather than just guessing. If I don't know something. I'd rather say, “Gee, I don't know,” rather than offer some “almost” opinion, because it just comes back at you...Maybe I'd rather listen more to gather information and try to regurgitate it as true and thought out as I can.

Songwriters are very successful people, at least they think so. I tend to agree.

The Identity

In Chapter V the focus was on the environment of a would-be songwriter and how that environment influenced, altered and directed the path of a would-be songwriter. I also asked a question that we shall address now, “How do we know the point at which the environmental influences begin to internalize into the self?” When does a person who was not a songwriter a second ago become a songwriter in this second? I'm not so sure we can arrive at a day or point that a behavior exists this moment that did not exist in the moment before. What we can do, though, is ask.

Songwriters are good communicators. They understand their gift and they recognize that the need to create is in their blood. Songwriters may not be able

to tell you why it is in their blood, but the songwriters I interviewed were able to describe to me when it was they began to feel like songwriters.

I remember that as a child. I remember that being a very strong self-expression because I like music. I don't know how to explain it. It touched my soul, the music, I guess the Carole King influence. I always wanted to be a musician, I always did from a small child. I remember like three years old wanting to be one. (Ann)

Well at about fifteen I started getting real experimental with it. Then, when I was sixteen is when I really discovered music that just had some passion or something I connected to, and I knew that's what I wanted to do even though I'd been singing for six or seven years. At that point I knew I wanted to make [it] my life. (Maria)

I think probably about the time I was in junior high school. I knew that I wanted to play music. Music was the only thing I could see where that would really allow you to be yourself. I was already into music so that was eventual place to go. (Jay)

When I was probably in my later teens. I think I wrote a lot of my emotions in my songs or what I felt I was able to put down in words and make it a song. (Michele)

What we remember in childhood are usually the things that remain with us long after we leave the nest. They are the memories that have left some indelible image that affects every part of the path we pursue in life. When I think back to my own childhood, a flood of images immediately comes to mind to remind me of the days that forever changed who I was and how I would later fit into the world. Some of those images still make me cringe, and it is those images that have dominated the person I am today. For many the paths were not so easily definable. It took years of mistakes to come to a point where we could look back and conclude that where we came from directly influenced where we went. For a songwriter the path was not too hard to find.

I don't remember anything else. I honestly don't. I guess when I knew I wanted to do it was when I was three, I wrote my first song (a song about Santa) and I chased that feeling for the rest of my life. (W.J.)

Ever since before I was a teenager. I mean I've always had music around me, but I never did play anything. My brothers had instruments and they had their own music and stuff, collections that they'd buy. I always liked it. (Tre)

There are many images of childhood, but none so powerful as those that appear every time we begin to look back. They are the first images to come to our minds and usually the last to leave. We think little about those memories until we get older and begin to reflect on whether those memories may have influenced what went wrong or what went well in our lives. It is somewhat like stepping up to accept an Academy Award. We start to reflect upon those people and events in our lives that have shaped us, molded us into who we are. The same is true if we were told we were going to die. We would look back, and what we would see would begin to make sense to us, and we would wonder "Why couldn't we have figured it out sooner?" Songwriters like lawyers or criminals do not always associate their "beginnings" with their callings in life, but as we have been told by a few of the fifteen songwriters, they knew at an early age where they were meant to go.

Our identity is the mental image we have of ourselves. Songwriters at some point imagine themselves as people who write songs, people who express themselves through song or music. Songwriters have told us they knew very early on that a songwriter was who they identified themselves to be. We perceive of ourselves as something or someone who exhibits certain behaviors; and as we do that, we begin our path to becoming that something.

Do we get better as that someone or something? Do we constantly seek to reshape our behavior to fit society's description, or do we just change to meet our own expectations of that identity? My question to the songwriters was whether they felt they were getting better as songwriters.

Oh yeah. I know because of the level of focus. I mean just the level of conveying a certain kind of situation, emotion, circumstance or some kind of illustration or story. I can tell a story and people know exactly what I'm communicating. There's no mistaking what it's about. That's good songwriting. (Jay)

I think so. I just feel that when I look back and read my first songs, they seem to be better quality. Maybe it's because I've matured and I'm older now and better able to make sense of it all. (Michele)

Uh-huh [yes]. [It is because of] maturity, living a little, experiencing more things. I'm not as immature as far as the world goes and things around me. I'm just more aware. (Elvin)

Songwriters have gotten better because they are able to reflect on their journeys. They have a piece of their history that they can look at and analyze, and from which they can move forward. It is not a behavior but an attitude, a way of looking at the world that has afforded them the opportunity to see their life from a different perspective. It is not that a songwriter feels his or her past is not as profound as the future but that growth and change can only add to the depth of his or her visions. What is vision but an emotion recreated in our minds. Songwriters are no different from the rest of us. They are allowed to mature into fathers and mothers, parents and citizens. For a songwriter the emotion that evolves from life's experiences becomes his or her canvass, his or her way to deal with everyday things that you or I may talk about with our best friends. Songwriters do seem to have that knack for staying younger though, even if it is only in mind, but eventually songwriters become victims of middle age just like the rest of us. It certainly does not mean that songwriters lose their perspective on good music, quite the contrary. Songwriters become much better tuned to a broader spectrum of human existence than they ever had been before. After all, Eric Clapton (1998) couldn't have written "My Father's Eyes" when he was "head banging" with Cream.

Do we ever change our identity? Do we ever get to a point in our life that the person we once perceived ourselves to be ceases to exist? I often ponder on the very idea of losing my identity once I reach those twilight years, and I cannot help but wonder what my life will be like. Will the memories and images of my childhood always be as vivid as they are now? Will I envision myself as someone very different from the person I envision myself to be today? These are questions that are at the very core of our self-identity. These are the questions that become crucial to understanding how or even if our self-perceptions change over the course of our life's path. Songwriters have provided a beginning to that understanding in the answers they gave me when I asked them if they would always envision themselves as songwriters.

Always, because once a musician, always a musician, so they say. Once a writer, always a writer. It's like no matter how old you get that art form always flows in your blood. It's like your mind takes life situations and puts it in song form and you can't really help it. You can't stop it. It happens anyway. (Tre)

Will I always? Yeah, because it's still my padded cell. Has to do with, I have to do it. I walk around doing it all day. I mean I see things and I feel things. I mean I could write this or do that. I'll always do that. It's just my padded cell. (Frankie)

Yeah. I don't see how I could not. It's just too much of a difficult part not to write out and I didn't decide that. I feel like it's not a decision. That's just the way it turned out. It's not like you consciously sit down and decide you'll use your will there. To me there's just some kinda flowing stream underneath all that that's gonna flow anyway. (Jay)

I tend to agree with Jay. There is some part of our identity that we have no control over, but he is not referring to some outside force that is in constant struggle with our own will to do some act. Jay is talking about a part of our identity that has become ingrained in our self. It is what seems "natural" to us as opposed to fighting a losing battle. It is that part of our self that evolves out of our experience, our past--a past that is ever present.

The fact of the matter is we never let go of our past. Whether our memories are good or bad, we have become part of those memories, and they have become a part of us. They are our time-line. We can look at them, remember them, and even feel sad or happy about them, but those images of all that we have endured in our lives are all that we have to show for our existence here. It really does not matter whether we have become saints or sinners, whether we have done good things or bad, whether we have accomplished great things or nothing at all. The important thing is that we are here, and we are somebody whether it is a sociologist or a songwriter, and the reason why we are those sociologists or those songwriters is because our environment led us here. Our environment led us to become something, and that something we became has left our mark on this world regardless of whether that mark was a song or a piece of advice. Our identity, then, is a result of

Memories, like the corners of my mind. Misty, water-colored memories,
of the way we were. (Hamlisch 1974)

CHAPTER VII

TYPES OF SONGWRITERS

Becoming a songwriter is a process. It involves learning about a social world and internalizing those learned meanings into the self. Becoming a songwriter, then, is a socializing process. In a study conducted by Groce (1991) the social context of songwriters was investigated. Groce contends that becoming a songwriter is a socialization process involving identity construction work. In other words, social actors engage in the process of becoming songwriters, they learn to reshape their identity as they experience and internalize what it means to become songwriters. Groce has identified four stages in the process of becoming a songwriter: the professional songwriter, the mature songwriter, the intermediate songwriter, and the beginning songwriter. The four stages that Groce has identified are the degrees to which songwriters have internalized the ideology of the social world of songwriters. The professional songwriter has reached a level of complete socialization as a songwriter. Groce (1991) suggests that professional songwriters know and understand every aspect of the social world of songwriters, and professional songwriters most often pursue songwriting as a full-time occupation. In contrast, the beginning songwriter is in the primary stage of "learning the ropes." Groce has provided a great deal of insight into the processural development of becoming a songwriter. There remains, though, a very important part of the process of becoming a songwriter that has not been examined.

We know the process of becoming does exist from Groce's (1991) study on songwriters, and we know that social actors do internalize what it means to become songwriters, but what we do not know is why songwriters in a beginning stage never advance to the professional stage. Are their differences similar to the differences found in other professions? If a social actor has already envisioned what it means to be a songwriter to him or her, then, will every social actor who chooses to become a songwriter experience all of Groce's stages in becoming a songwriter? I believe that the type of songwriter a social actor believes himself or herself to be will determine whether or not he or she will advance through Groce's four stages. The types of songwriters become very important to the kind of process a songwriter will experience. Knowing the types of songwriters can help fill the gap in our knowledge about the social context of songwriters and about what kind of process they will experience as they become songwriters. This knowledge may help us to determine why very few reach the level of a Bob Dylan or a level which is considered the epitome of any social role.

Investigating the process of becoming a songwriter has resulted in a clearer explanation of the factors, internal and external, that influence an individual to become a songwriter. The process of becoming a songwriter was greatly influenced by several musical similarities found in all fifteen of the respondents' early environments. The process of becoming songwriters was also influenced by how the respondents perceived themselves as they experienced, defined, and attached meaning to the process of becoming songwriters.

Another goal of this study was to provide an understanding of the process of becoming a songwriter by allowing that process to be explained by the songwriter. A better understanding of any process by is always

closer to the truth if told in the words of the social actor who is experiencing the process. Songwriters define much of their experience in becoming songwriters by how they perceive themselves to exist within that process of becoming. It is from the songwriters' own self-perceptions that I was able to identify similar characteristics from which five types of songwriters emerge.

Five types of songwriters were identified: the "complete" songwriter, the "family" songwriter, the "convert" songwriter, the "collaborator" songwriter, and the "opportunist" songwriter. The five types of songwriters differ in the amount of songwriter characteristics they possess. The eight characteristics range from recognition of maturity to musical influences to adaptability as a songwriter (see Table 1).

In three of the fifteen interviews with songwriters all eight characteristics I identified were present. The three songwriters who exhibited all eight characteristics were categorized as complete songwriters. They would be considered the epitome of a songwriter if such an all-inclusive definition existed. For a songwriter, like any other social identity, to be something does not necessarily mean you have to have had a certain level of societal recognition and success as that something. Quite the contrary, songwriters, like any other social actors, define their own social world as much as it is defined for them, and the definition provided by songwriters allows society to view them and ultimately accept them as songwriters. In the most basic way, then, it is the songwriter who has provided the definition for what it means to be a complete songwriter. The remaining four categories are listed in order of the number of the eight characteristics they possess.

The family songwriters are categorized together because they are young to the songwriting role, yet they would be considered serious about and

dedicated to their process of becoming songwriters. The difference between the family songwriter and the complete songwriter is that the family songwriter was born into a songwriting family. Only one family songwriter did not have a father or mother with whom he or she could recall having written songs with at an early age, yet this family songwriter had a great-grandfather who worked for Irving Berlin.

The converts are songwriters categorized together because all four began a career in music in some form other than songwriting. Two of the converts are singers and the other two converts are guitar players. None of the four chose to become songwriters but were encouraged to do so to provide them a broader opportunity base from which to be successful in the music industry. Songwriting is not the first love of the converts as it is to the complete songwriter. The converts have no need to express some inner message. They became songwriters to further a career not to tell a story.

The fourth type of songwriter is the collaborator. This respondent became a songwriter to help out a family member who was already a songwriter. The collaborator does not wish to make money or express herself with songwriting. Her main goal is to provide support and assistance to someone she loves. The ability of the collaborator is of no less significance than any other songwriter, it is just that the collaborator sees himself or herself as more of an assistant to the real thing.

The final type of songwriter is the opportunist. This type consists of three songwriters who became songwriters because they wanted to be the next overnight success. They became interested and involved in songwriting to make money, and they came from towns that had produced some very successful acts. They are not well-rounded songwriters. One opportunist has a fear of getting up

in front of people to sing, and the other two have had minimal, if any, experience singing their songs in public. The opportunists are songwriters who will eventually move on to other social roles. In a basic way the opportunists are just visiting.

The Characteristics

The first characteristic I identified was the one that was present in all fifteen songwriters: musical influences in early environment. There were differing degrees and forms of musical influences for all of the songwriters but in each case music was an important part of their childhood experiences. The musical influences ranged from parents who played instruments and/or sang to grandparents who played instruments and/or sang. Three songwriters had a parent whose occupation was affiliated with the music industry. The particulars were not always the same for every songwriter, but nonetheless the musical influences were present in the environments of all fifteen songwriters.

No music class can discuss the role of music in American culture without mentioning the sixties and social unrest that inspired many young people to become songwriters. Music in the sixties was less about love and positive attitudes as it was about awareness and change, and music provided the voice through which young people could encourage that change. When we think about songwriters, and when we envision a complete songwriter, many times we conjure up images of John Lennon, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez, people who have perfected the process of songwriting and people who are closely associated with a time period during which songs were about life experiences that were described in more realistic terms and not some candy-coated version of it. Thus, we see the second characteristic defined by the songwriters themselves: being influenced to become songwriters by people who were known and successful for their

ability to write as well as perform songs. The complete songwriters describe in their own words those people who had the most influence on them to become songwriters.

John Denver, the early Led Zeppelin stuff, Yard Birds [and] Crosby, Stills and Nash. (Tre)

The Beatles right from the bat. I mean right when they came out. They still are my favorite. It's hard for me to top them. I still listen to them and go wow. Here they were, young guys 19 to 22, and in a relatively short span of time turned out an enormous body of incredible work. It's unbelievable. The chord changes, melodies, lyrics. I mean that's just the technical side and the social side they changed the world. (Frankie)

I really got into Gordon Lightfoot. Gordon Lightfoot was one of my [favorites]. Gordon Lightfoot was a major influence. Then later got into Jethro Tull. I really like a lot of things that were unique and were different approaches to music. (Jay)

Although the complete songwriters were influenced by people known to be successful songwriters, as were some of the songwriters in the next category: the family songwriters. Two of the family songwriters were quite young, yet they were still influenced by some very successful singer/songwriters. Both of the younger family songwriters had fathers who were musicians and songwriters, so their influences in becoming songwriters were taken from their fathers' generation. People like Edgar Winter, Bette Midler, and Carole King were mentioned as people who had influenced them to become songwriters.

In the remaining categories in which there are eight songwriters, all but two have been influenced by some very successful singer/songwriters. Songwriters have role models just like any other social actor, and twelve of the fifteen songwriters I interviewed had chosen very visible and successful people who were recognized equally as well for their songwriting skills as for their ability to sing.

Music is a form of expression that much we already know this. The significance to this study is whether the songwriters acknowledge songwriting to be a form of expression for them. All fifteen songwriters did understand that songwriting was a way to express, but the complete songwriters understood songwriting to be their way to express. The acknowledgement of songwriting as a means to express themselves becomes the third distinguishable characteristic. Two of the complete songwriters acknowledged songwriting to provide a form of protection from society as well as a form of expression.

I could be painfully shy when I was real young, and this was my escape route, my padded cell. Still is really. I just know for me it brought me out of my shell. A shy little shell, and music was a way, and I suppose other people can get out other ways. I mean, an auto mechanic who loves to do it [be a mechanic] can come out that way. Whatever it takes. I was really shy, really, really shy. Even though I had a band all through junior high school, that was a way to express the self. (Frankie)

To me there's just this inborn need to interpret and express. I just have that need, and to me one of the coolest things to do is to be able to communicate to other people an idea, a picture, an emotion, a scenario, a circumstance, a situation and have them be able to understand it, to feel it, to really put them in my place. (Jay)

It was one way for me to express 'cause I couldn't talk to anybody. Things would always come up, and music was always my way of sheltering myself. It was a wall thing...it was my way of expressing my emotions. (Tre)

Only two other songwriters acknowledged songwriting to be a way to express themselves. Both of them were in the family category.

I kinda checked out, and that's when I started writing. So that I could express myself to my parents, to my peers, to the girls. (Ann)

It emotionally helped me through the years of growing up. I found that for me it was an area where I could channel my emotions and thoughts into and that it was a part of me when I started writing. (W.J.)

Being able to understand what it is that songwriting provides to him or her shows that the songwriter has a certain amount of control over his or her decision

to become and remain a songwriter. It is a recognition on the part of the songwriter that music and/or writing songs has value to him or her. Having placed value on something means we are aware of its effects on us; and if those effects make us feel better about ourselves, we are much more likely to engage in those behaviors. Finally, it is the meaning we attach to something that determines how valuable that something will be to us. To the complete songwriters, then, being able to express themselves through songwriting is a process they recognize to be valuable to the persons they believe themselves to be.

For some social actors becoming something has a much deeper meaning. There are instances when a social actor may choose to become something because it “runs in the family.” Sometimes there is generation after generation of “military men” or generation after generation of teachers or race car drivers. The social actors who acknowledge that becoming something is “in their blood” are social actors who have identified their social roles as intrinsic to whom they believe they were meant to be. To them it is not something one becomes but something one already is, and it is this unalterable self-image that shows a clear gap between the three complete songwriters and the remaining twelve songwriters. We can now see the fourth distinguishable characteristic of the complete songwriter, namely that they identify and explain songwriting as an innate part of their selves.

It's just too much of a difficult part not to write out, and I didn't decide that. I feel like it's not a decision. That's just the way it turned out. You plant a seed, and it turns out well. You go “Oh, it's a pink tulip with black stripes.” It's not like, to me, you consciously sit down and decide you'll do. To me there's just some kind of flowing stream underneath all that that's just gonna flow anyway. And I think that [what] the bulk of people do with their lives is swim upstream. It gets to them unless there's some [people] that really stand out. It's hard for people to really see who they really are or what they wanna do. (Jay)

It's like no matter how old you get that art form flows in your blood. And you're always...I don't know what it is. It's almost like you're mind takes life situations and puts it in song form, and you can't really help... You can't stop it. It happens anyway. (Tre)

Has to do with I have to do it. I walk around doing it all day. I mean I see things and I feel things. I mean I could write this or do that, and so I'll always do that [songwriting]. It's just my padded cell. It's my way of cushioning me, maybe learning. (Frankie)

Of the remaining twelve songwriters only two in the family category acknowledged that songwriting is an important part of who they are, but they were unable to understand how songwriting manifested itself within their creative selves. The complete songwriters were very much aware of their need to write songs, so much aware that they explained it as an innate part of who they are.

Many of us dream of becoming doctors, actors, astronauts, etc., and sometimes those dreams materialize; other times we realize that there is another more "natural" path for us. Songwriters, like many social actors, know at an early age that they want to be songwriters. When I asked the fifteen songwriters when they knew that songwriting was what they wanted to do in life, eleven of the songwriters answered with a reference to music and not necessarily to songwriting. I do not think many of us know and feel so sure about our futures that we are capable of making such confident predictions, yet four of the fifteen songwriters did just that. Although it is not important to marvel at their accuracy, it is however important to notice that some songwriters are much more comfortable with who they are because their self-perceptions at an early age were much clearer to them. That insight identifies the fifth characteristic that separates the complete songwriters from the remaining twelve songwriters: acknowledging at an early age that songwriting, not just music, was their calling. It is the words of the complete songwriters that help us make that distinction.

Do you remember Ozzie and Harriet, and Ricky would come out at

the end and sing those songs? I used to live for that, but that was a young boy thing. Of course you grow out of that, [at least] you're suppose to. I've always dabbled in it [songwriting] but I knew, probably about 16 or 17 that I really wanted to do that. (Frankie)

I think probably [I knew] about the time I was in junior high school. I knew that I wanted to play music. Music was the only thing that would really allow you to be yourself. I love to make music; and if I did nothing else but make instrumental music, I'd be happy. (Jay)

Ever since before I was a teenager [I knew]. I mean I've always had music around me, but I never did play anything. I thought I had something that people would be able to relate to. I wanted to get some of my emotions out. Whether there was people there or not, I was still gonna do it [write songs I could play]. (Tre)

Becoming something means we progress towards a clearer image of ourselves of being that "something." To recognize early on that we already have certain talents and abilities characteristic of that something is a sign that the process we experience to become that something will be much smoother indeed. No path is without obstacles, but having a sense of the direction that we will travel allows us to concentrate on those obstacles that stand in the way of reaching our goals.

In interviewing the fifteen songwriters there was a point in the interview at which time I asked them if they felt they had gotten better as songwriters. Half of the songwriters did feel they had gotten better as songwriters. Commercial success in songwriting is about selling songs and making money. Of the half who acknowledged getting better, two of the songwriters related getting better to some form of commercial success or recognition. The five remaining songwriters related their improvement as songwriters to personal growth and maturity. The difference between the remaining five songwriters was a clearer explanation given by the complete songwriters. Recognizing that their own personal maturity is what has made them better songwriters becomes the sixth identifiable characteristic.

I think probably the biggest difference is I think differently. I think in a different way than I thought before. I think it just comes from being 44 years old and having gone through a lot of living and through a whole lot of experiences of raising kids, struggling to survive and trying to keep one foot in music the whole time. There's just that sense of having lived a lot longer, having been around. In a way it's simpler I think than it used to be. A lot of smoke clears after awhile. (Jay)

You're seeing things clearer. You're seeing things straight-up. No more narcotics. Everything I'm handling straight-up. And I'm seeing a lot of the lyrics. Everything makes more sense. It's more positive. My 39 years of living [has made me better]. Being open-minded and my wife opening me up to different styles. (Tre)

I absolutely do. I can tell because I think clearer. I mean I'm just trying to. I can look at old things I've done, and some of them are still enjoyable. I've had to try and retrain myself. We're always analyzing. Life is not that perfect. (Frankie)

The two remaining songwriters who acknowledged that becoming better songwriters was a result of having matured as a person were able to identify the relationship, but they were brief and unsure in their explanation. One songwriter was categorized as a convert, and the other songwriter fell into the opportunist category.

Maturity. Living a little. Experiencing more things. I'm, I'm not as, well, immature as far as the world goes and things around me. I'm just more aware. (Elvin)

I think so. I just feel that when I look back and read my first songs they seem to be better quality. Maybe it's because I've matured and better able to make sense of it all. (Melanie)

Sometimes we realize that things happen for a reason. We may not always understand why they happen, and many times we do not always associate our choices as having influenced those things to happen, but we accept them nonetheless. Songwriters do realize and accept their role in the music industry, and some of those songwriters understand that in order to survive in such a competitive industry one has to be able to adapt to the changing needs of that industry, yet many songwriters do not. Some songwriters are either unwilling to

adapt or do not have the ability or talent to adjust to the changes that oftentimes will keep songwriters working in the music industry. Many times the inability to adapt forces them to look for a new profession. A complete songwriter, on the other hand, is talented and quite capable of filling many roles within the music industry if that is what the industry demands. It is a matter of survival, and to a complete songwriter it is not a difficult transition. The complete songwriter never stops writing songs, but in many instances the complete songwriter will adapt to his or her own needs as well as adapting to the needs of the music industry. The complete songwriter learns to be a utility person, someone who can fill many roles. The ability to adapt to the many needs and expectations of the social world of songwriters becomes the seventh distinguishable characteristic of the complete songwriter.

I was always the center, the guy that always held things together and I usually was playing the instrument that was missing, and I was usually backing up the lead singer in a band....It seemed to be somehow that I was the glue that held it together. I don't know why that was. I don't know whether it's because I had a good sense of music and I knew how to put it together....I played bass and sang back-up most the time....The thing at the time was, and this was the early seventies, you had to be kind of a variety band. You had to be able to do a little bit of everything...kind of an all around band. (Jay)

We played barhouse dances, school dances and church dances. They don't seem to have that anymore. We always [played], every Friday and Saturday...I mean we were busy all through school. In fact I think we made...forty or fifty bucks a piece, a night. This is back in the sixties. We had a car. Took care of my own clothes. Moved to Florida and made an even better living at it. Raised a family, but I think I'm learning that you don't have to lock yourself into something. (Frankie)

The third complete songwriter spoke more of his ability to adapt to the needs of his audience.

I want people to listen to how I write, what I write about, have them feel the same emotions that I feel...get some things on the radio. I'd like people to hear what I have....Down here in Music City it's all writer's nights...so you gotta whip out your best stuff in a short amount of time. (Tre)

Complete songwriters are some of the best “jammers” in the business. They have been around, and they have learned that in order to play you have to be willing and talented enough to step up and fill in. The complete songwriter has a deep love for music in general; and even though songwriting is his or her niche, being some part of music is better than not being a part of it at all. It is about diversity. Complete songwriters have that talent. They understand and accept with enthusiasm that being songwriters is about understanding and being able to assume every other role in the music industry. George Herbert Mead ([1931] 1993) calls it the generalized other.

...the complex co-operative processes and activities and institutional functionings of organized human society are also possible only insofar as every individual involved in them or belonging to that society can take the general attitudes of all other such individuals with reference to these processes and activities and institutional functionings, and to the organized social world of experiential relations and interactions thereby constituted--and can direct his own behavior. (p. 154)

Songwriters understand the importance of knowing all the roles, but only a few are capable and talented enough to “play the field.” The ability to adjust and adapt explains the versatility of the complete songwriter. It also explains a songwriters’ ability to endure the competition and rejection in an industry that is constantly changing. To survive in the music industry a songwriter must learn to incorporate his or her own musical and lyrical desires with the changing demands of the music industry, a very difficult task. Only three of the fifteen songwriters acknowledged that being successful songwriters had to do with a partnership between their expectations from their songwriting and the demands of the music industry. The eighth and final characteristic of a complete songwriter is the acknowledgement that success as a songwriter can come from understanding the commercial and personal expectations of songwriting.

I've sort of stumbled into a few successes but not nearly like I want to be a successful songwriter. Although there are two sides of it. One is you are writing songs and you feel good and you feel like you're learning and you're moving ahead. That has nothing to do with business, the music business. That just has to do with if you feel like you're getting better; and as long as you're getting better, there's a side that says you're successful. (Frankie)

I haven't made it big yet, but the songs that I've already written and had people listen to, it's good material. It's good material in the sense as far as looking at how I feel about it. I'm getting my point across to other people, ones that have listened. And if I can, if other people can relate to the way I feel about it, I consider that good. That was the message I was trying to get across. (Tre)

I am successful in the sense of, well, looking out there if you're talking monetary success, not really. But yeah, as far as developing my craft where now I'm confident to seriously pursue that. And having the studio and being able to do our own thing. our own demos. I'm where I'm suppose to be. I'm on course... The next phase is moving more towards the extroverted side [the business side of music]. I've spent the last 4 or 5 years learning how to write for the market place. (Jay)

Songwriting is about success. Songwriting is about growth and maturity. And songwriting is about understanding oneself as well as the industry to which the songwriter is seeking recognition as a contributor. There are many dimensions to being a songwriter. I have identified only eight characteristics that separate some songwriters from others. In doing so I have provided an image of songwriters that could be perceived only by the songwriters themselves. It is the acceptable image. It is the only image that counts.

The following chart (Table 1) provides a visual explanation of the types of songwriters and which of the eight characteristics are present in those types. The columns are the different types of songwriter categories. The rows are the characteristics identified to describe a complete songwriter. The characteristics are labeled one through eight and have been explained in a list below the graph.

Table 1. Types of Songwriters

*characteristic	Types				
	complete	family	convert	collaborator	opportunist
1	x	x	x	x	x
2	x	x	x	x	
3	x	x	x		
4	x	x			
5	x		x		
6	x	x			
7	x	x	x		
8	x				

- * 1 - musical influences during early environment
 2 - being influenced to become a songwriter by people who were known and successful for their ability to write as well as perform songs
 3 - the acknowledgement that songwriting was “their” means to express
 4 - describing songwriting as “in the blood”
 5 - recognizing that personal maturity is what has made them better songwriters
 6 - knowing at an early age that songwriting, not just music, was their calling
 7 - being able to adapt to their own needs as well as the needs of the music industry
 8 - acknowledging that success as a songwriter can come from understanding the commercial and personal expectations of songwriting.

Sharing their memories and self perceptions, for the greater part, with a complete stranger has been an intruding experience for the songwriters, but it has not been in vain. In this study I have identified many similarities between and among them that provide a broader look into the socialization process of songwriters. In the following chapter, I shall analyze the findings of this study, what they mean and why they are important to the socialization process of songwriters.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I investigated the process of becoming a songwriter. I focused on two factors of that process: early environmental influences and self-perceptions. I believe both of these factors played a very important role in explaining why certain individuals became songwriters and not other social statuses. I also believe that how a social actor perceives himself or herself will determine the direction of the path he or she will take in life. In a basic way our self-perception is what we believe we are destined to become, and we will follow the path that our self-perception envisions us to travel. It is the same for a songwriter.

Songwriters come from environments that are full of musical influences and experiences. They have parents and grandparents who sing. There are instruments around the house and people there who play those instruments. Songwriters are surrounded by music in one form or another. These omnipresent influences are internalized by the would-be songwriters, and they come to perceive themselves as musical beings.

Songwriters, like all social actors, are greatly influenced to travel their “natural” paths. This study has provided some insight into the environments of songwriters and how environment directed the “natural” path for songwriters. The environment in which we grow up provides symbols that we internalize to help us make sense of the world that as children we do not really understand or that we

do not control. We take those symbols, and we attach them to behaviors that we learn to recognize and with which we associate meanings. We become little models of a new form of our parents' behaviors. Just as we play house during those developmental stages, we also learn to play guitar, play chess, or play at robbing a bank. George Herbert Mead ([1931] 1993) understood that process of development, and it is worth repeating here.

The process is one which develops, to be sure, into a more or less definite technique and is controlled; and yet we can say that it has arisen out of situations similar to which little children play at being a parent, at being a teacher--vague personalities that are about them and which affect them and on which they depend. These are personalities which they take, roles they play, and in so far control the development of their own personality. (p. 153)

It would be safe to assume that songwriters, in early development, were surrounded by specific types of behaviors. They were behaviors that provided the framework from which these would-be songwriters would build their own self-perceptions. In a way our self-perceptions become the reaction to a process of learning about the world just as these fifteen songwriters' self-perceptions were the reaction to a foundation deeply embedded with musical influences.

Environment, then, is integral to the development of the self. As a songwriter learns and internalizes the symbols of music into the self, a songwriter begins to perceive himself or herself as someone with musical capabilities. And it is that self-perception that becomes the part of the process of becoming that directs future behavior. Each respondent was asked how they perceived themselves in specific situations as they progressed as a songwriter. Although many of the answers were similar, the important outcome was how ingrained the self-perceptions of being a songwriter were to the songwriters. In the case of one songwriter it became important enough to terminate a relationship.

Investigating the process of becoming a songwriter has provided some important insights into just how powerful environment is to the development of the self. In other words, the kind of environment we grow up in, negative or positive, will become so ingrained in who we are that to try and change that self-perception would be nearly impossible. If we grow up believing, as some of these songwriters did, that certain characteristics are "in the blood," then the implication would be that social actors, like songwriters, may believe that who or what they become is something they have no control over. From this perspective it is not difficult to understand how some children exposed to such things as abuse could grow up to be adults who abuse.

Two of the fifteen songwriters were discouraged from pursuing songwriting yet they both became songwriters anyway. Both songwriters had many musical influences in their early environments, which would indicate that action or the modeled behavior in childhood is what these two songwriters internalized as meaningful to their own self-identity. The suggestion is that early environment is an important visual aid to the development of the self--that what we see is just as important to who we become as is what we hear.

Songwriters are just a small segment of the many social worlds that comprise our society, and it would not be too difficult to conclude that wanting to become a songwriter was probably influenced by something or someone in the early environment. There are many parts of our self that are not so obvious. Investigating the process of becoming songwriters has provided some valuable insights into the extent of the influence of our environment on our selves. The environment that we grow up in influences not only who we become but how we choose to become that something. Most importantly, the environment

influences the extent to which we internalize the ideology we believe epitomizes that something.

Songwriters choose different methods or ways to become songwriters, and by doing so the songwriters became different types of songwriters. Just like those of us who may envision ourselves as being fathers or mothers, we become different parents depending on the symbols we internalized of our own fathers and mothers in childhood. In other words, we may all choose to be parents but how we become and exist as parents are very different. Some people are great at being parents, and then there are some who should never be parents at all. It is not about stages but about types. The same is true for songwriters. Twelve of the fifteen songwriters did not envision themselves as “the” songwriter, but more of a derivative of what I categorized as the complete songwriter. The twelve songwriters had very similar ideals of the complete songwriter, but became songwriters that were “natural” to them.

In the final analysis of the process of becoming a songwriter I was able to categorize the songwriters into groups depending on the presence of those characteristics found in a complete songwriter. It does not necessarily mean that all but three of the songwriters are just social actors who “wanna-be” songwriters, but that they have chosen a type of songwriter that fits within their self-perception of being a songwriter. It is analogous to basketball players who believe that being the best basketball player would mean being Michael Jordan, yet become great basketball players in their own right. We understand what the best is and many times we can be in complete agreement in describing who the best is, but we are also realistic. Being something that we feel comfortable and capable of being is what is “natural” for us, it is realistic. Being Michael Jordan can only be the self-perception of Michael Jordan. But it is our self-perception,

greatly influenced by experiences in early environment, that determines what level, what type, or what kind of anything that we become.

The process of becoming, then, has no real competitive adversary in terms of what we will experience as we find our niche in the world, regardless of whether that niche is positive or negative. No other single entity can match the power that our childhood environment has in influencing, directing, and altering our selves. When we talk about or choose to research some group of individuals, we cannot even begin to understand the process of becoming “something” until we first examine the environment into which each individual was born. That is what this study has found to be true of songwriters and that is what should be the foundation of any study conducted on human behavior--environment determines self-perception and self-perception determines behavior.

Limitations

Investigating the process of becoming a songwriter has helped to provide a closer look at some of the factors that influence our decision to become members of specific social worlds. It also helps us to narrow the field in identifying where those factors originate. The results of this study uncovered some similarities not only in environment but also in self-perceptions of those individuals who have experienced the process of becoming songwriters. The results also revealed that even though many of these individuals experienced some of the same things, they experienced many different things as well. Through Mead's ([1931] 1993) explanation in "The Emergent Self," we understand that no two paths can be the same because no two experiences are the same. Our “natural” path is one that has evolved as we have evolved out of differing environmental experiences and how we perceive those experiences. It is the way we see the world. But the world cannot be generalized through the experiences and self-perceptions of

songwriters, or by just caucasian songwriters. A much less homogenized sample could also prove important to this type of research. By delving into the world of songwriters we have limited our ability to address whether there are similar environmental experiences for social actors in other social worlds and whether other social actors' experiences, if similar, are as powerful in determining their "natural" paths as are those of songwriters.

Future Research

In researching the process of becoming a songwriter I have focused on environmental influences and self-perceptions of the songwriter. I believe these two factors are crucial to understanding the process of becoming a songwriter. I would suggest that these two factors are crucial to becoming a member in any social world. When we think about how small children internalize the behaviors of their primary socializing agents, we can only begin to understand and explain why it is that social actors choose to become doctors instead of teachers or waitresses instead of dancers.

Environmental influences are the situations in childhood that we define and internalize into our selves. They become our framework for dealing with the world around us. Our knowledge of the world and the methods we choose to participate in it are results of those influences that have provided us meaning in the first place. If we understand that a child who is abused during his or her childhood has a much greater chance to repeat that behavior than a child who has not been abused, we could safely assume that the definitions provided in childhood are very deeply ingrained into the self. The self evolves from the experiences of childhood and it is those childhood experiences that determine the "natural" path we travel as adults, at least that was found to be true for songwriters.

The research I have conducted on songwriters has shown a clear connection between the musical influences in the songwriters' childhood and their choices to pursue a career in the musical field. It is not that children who have been exposed to music will always choose an identity closely related to music but that children exposed to music in childhood will internalize music as a behavior that they know and understand. It is important to remember that not all behaviors we internalize become exhibited as the dominant ones in our own behavior but that certain behaviors fit better into our self-perceptions than do others.

We know a great deal about the internalization of behaviors in childhood, but we do not know the degree to which those environmental influences determine our path in society. Will we become a batterer or will we become a lawyer or will we become both, and can we align the occupation we choose with personality characteristics? I believe that we need an immense amount of research on the effects of environment on the socialization process to provide a better understanding of self-perception in determining what path we travel in life.

As for songwriters, they are a special breed indeed. I admire them for their ability to travel beyond basic instinct and provide to the world the only language that transcends all other human limitations. It is the songwriters who provide us with a sense of companionship, a sense of emotion that may have been lost to us in another place or another time. And even though songwriters become who they are because of their environments, they still represent a social world that many of us view as "the" social world.

Sing us a song, Mr. Piano Man
Sing us a song tonight.
We're all in the mood for a melody
And you got us feeling alright.
Billy Joel 1973

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

1. What is your age?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. Tell me about your parents
 - describe their personalities
 - describe their relationship
 - describe their interests and activities
4. Do you have any siblings? If so
 - what is your rank?
 - describe their personalities.
 - describe their interests and activities
5. Did either or both of your parents or siblings play a musical instrument in school? Did that influence you? How?
6. Did you play a musical instrument in school? How did that influence you?
7. Did either or both of your parents sing around the house? Did that influence you? How?
8. Did either or both parents participate in any choir groups in school or church?
9. When you were growing up, do you remember whether either or both of your parents played music around the house?
10. Did either or both parents have music collections? If they played them, were you influenced by them?
11. Was either of your parents a member of a band? If so, what type? Did that influence you? How?
12. Did either parent ever write poems or songs?

13. Did either of your sets of grandparents play instruments or sing in any capacity? Describe.
14. Did your parents take you to any concerts? What type? If so, how did the experience influence you?
15. As far back in school as you can remember what were your favorite classes? How?
16. Did you take any music classes in school? If yes, describe. Did they influence you in any way?
17. Who were your early influences in becoming a songwriter? How did they influence you?
18. Did your parents ever discourage you from songwriting, then or now? Why do you think they did or did not?

II. SELF-PERCEPTIONS

19. Would you consider yourself popular in school? Why or why not?
20. Would you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert? Why?
21. Did you ever write poetry, short stories or literary works?
22. Describe your teenage years.
23. Have you ever used narcotics or alcohol? Describe.
24. At what time in your life do you remember thinking, "Songwriting is what I want to do in life?"
25. Do you remember what it was that made you feel you would choose to be a songwriter?
26. Describe some of the first songs you wrote. What were the topics of those songs?
27. What do you feel you do best--music or lyrics? Why?
28. Do you think you've gotten better as a songwriter? If so, how?
29. When your songs are showcased do you sing them? Why or why not?
 - a. If you sing them, describe yourself in comparison to the other songwriters.
30. Do you think that reaching songwriting success has more to do with

talent or something else? Why and what if something else?

31. How do you perceive yourself now as opposed to when you first started?
32. How has that perception changed, and why has it changed?
33. Do you consider yourself a successful songwriter? Why or why not?
34. Have you ever been paid for your songwriting?
35. When you first started what did you wish to say with songwriting? Why?
36. When you first started what did you wish to gain/accomplish with songwriting? Why?
37. Has what you wish to say and gain changed since then? Why?
38. When you first started what types of venues did you play in?
39. What is different about the types of venues you play in now?
40. How do you perceive yourself in the venues you play in now as opposed to the beginning venues you started out in? Why?
41. Which do you think changed first, you or the venue? Why?
42. Do you or have you ever attended workshops and/or seminars? If so, why? Describe how that influenced you.
43. Do you subscribe to any songwriter magazines? In what ways have they helped or influenced you?
44. Have you ever gone back to some of the first places you played in? Why? How did you feel?
45. Are there any ways in which your spouse/significant other helps you in your songwriting? Describe. How do their efforts or lack of efforts make you feel? Why?
46. Have you ever collaborated with someone else? Why? If so, how did that experience make you feel?
47. Are there any events in your life that have influenced your productivity? Describe.
48. What level do you hope to reach? Why?
49. At that level describe how you would perceive yourself.
50. What do you think will change that will help you get to that level?

51. Will you always envision yourself as a songwriter? Why?

APPENDIX B

In Completion of Master's Thesis
Western Kentucky University 1999

-----Respondent Consent Form-----

The purpose of this research project is to examine the factors that influence, alter, or direct the process of becoming a songwriter and/or the patterns that may exist among those people who become songwriters. This research project is being conducted in an effort to complete a Master of Arts in Sociology.

The benefits to the respondents are the possibilities of future research and positive changes that could occur in the structure of hierarchy within the music industry. By better understanding the amount of control songwriters have in becoming a songwriter, it might help them become more aware of how to use that control to benefit the songwriter and the music industry.

Respondents will be asked a series of questions concerning the research topic, and their responses will be recorded onto audio cassette. Although some of the questions may be viewed as personal, answering will not in any way affect the respondent's reputation as confidentiality is guaranteed by the researcher, Becky L. Ehls. Respondent's name will not be used in the final thesis paper. The respondent's identity will be known only to researcher, and the respondent's name will be replaced with a pseudonym at the completion of the data collection process.

Participation is completely voluntary, and respondents may refuse to answer any particular question or discontinue participation at any time. By participating, respondents give the researcher the right to use any information in completion of her master's thesis and for publication purposes.

I understand that the contents of the audiotapes used in the interview are for the interviewer and supervisor only and will be secured in an on campus location for three years following the completion of the research project. This study has been satisfactorily explained to me. I understand that I may request a copy of this consent form. I understand what my participation will involve, and I agree to participate according to the provisions stated. I may also request further information by contacting Becky L. Ehls at (615) 826 - 9831 or (502) 745 - 2150.

RESPONDENT'S SIGNATURE _____

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

APPENDIX C
PROFILE

<u>Songwriter</u>	<u>Occupation</u> (other than songwriting)	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Music Category</u>	<u>Years Writing</u>
Tre	cable tech	married	2	38	folk, rock & blues	22
Ann	yoga instructor	married	2	36	folk & country	23
Elvin	U-Haul utility	single	0	33	crossover country	15
W.J.	band; producer	single	0	27	rock	24
Pierce	mechanic	divorced	3	45	contem. country	22
Renni	bartender	married	2	49	country	14
Caryn	homemaker	married	3	45	country, kids & classical	20
Kenny	supervisor	married	1	30	country, pop & classic rock	9
Austin	studio musician	divorced	0	33	country rock	5

APPENDIX C (cont.)

Frankie	road manager	married	3	49	pop rock	27
Lefty	rehab counselor	married	5	47	country	10
Angie	singer/model	single	0	27	contemporary	3
Jay	contractor	married	4	46	country, pop, blues & alternative	28
Maria	sales clerk	single	0	23	R & B, pop & country	6
Melanie	finance manager	divorced	1	39	country	8

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